



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92521-0132

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TO: Jason Stajich
Chair, Riverside Division

FROM: Lucille Chia, Chair *Lucille Chia*
CHASS Executive Committee

RE: Review of the Report of the Online Undergraduate Degree Task Force

The UC Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP) was tasked with evaluation the feasibility and desirability of an online degree program. The committee was comprised of twelve members from all over the UC's. The task force posed questions and tried to determine if an online degree could meet UC standards. The task force was **not** responsible for determining the effectiveness of online classes.

In assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each of the three policies, the UCEP used Quality Criteria (based on *Characteristics of Educational Quality* written by the committee in 2011), which emphasized: student access to core UC faculty and to a research-based environment; as well as intellectual and cultural diversity, all of which are more important than the mere transmission of information.

Moreover, "the task force feels strongly that the rapid shift to online-only learning following recent campus closures due to COVID-19 should not be used as a template for moving forward in this domain in the future" (p. 8 of the report). Certainly the significantly negative sentiments voiced in the UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) conducted during Spring term 2020 (link on p. 8 of the report) explains why the task force wanted to dissociate its general examination of the development of online degree programs from the pandemic experience. Nevertheless, as we note below, the remote learning during the last several school terms provided much useful information and a cautionary tale.

The UCEP proposed three options and rejected a fourth:

1. Policy 1: Not fully remote (allowing for up to 1/3 online)
2. Policy 2: Fully Remote OK
 - a. FULLY Online degrees
 - b. Many degrees can include online components
3. Policy 3: Remote but not comparable to UC degree, for example offering "BA of Arts in Economics"
4. NOT recommended: online degrees taught by different faculty

It is a thoughtful report that notes:

1. online education *could* meet UC standards, but would be expensive to achieve, more so at the undergraduate than for the graduate levels
2. the costs are not just financial, but would also demand greater effort and time from all participants, instructors, and students alike
3. moreover, if a UC campus offers programs that vary in the extent of online and in-person (face-to-face/F2F) instruction, then this may result in inequities in how different students have access to the “UC experience” and in the amount of work that different faculty have, raising questions about standards for personnel actions
4. lower-cost alternatives can be implemented, but at the expense of aggravating educational inequities and be less successful in meeting UC quality criteria
5. as yet, unanswerable questions include: how would online programs affect the quality of UC’s educational offerings in comparison with other institutions (which do not have online degree programs)?

The CHASS EC had several questions about specific points in the report.

1. For Policy 1: What is the rationale for the 1/3 non-remote major and GE requirements? The majority percentage of coursework would be allowed in remote format, but the report gives no supporting documents explaining how this percentage was worked out.
2. The report states several times that UC already has fully remote courses (prior to the pandemic). How many? What are the hard numbers around course success, student satisfaction, etc? What is the allowable number of such courses?

Further, the CHASS EC’s discussion of this report and the written reviews by two of its members note:

1. The task force aims to separate its assessment of online undergraduate programs, although the report does address relatively briefly the experience of UC campuses’ forced and largely improvised “remote learning” due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, any further plans for an online undergraduate program should be placed on hold until we have a clearer understanding of what the pedagogical effects upon students have been and how faculty feel the quality of their teaching has been negatively (or positively) affected.
2. Moreover, during a time, even when our campus resources are already stretched--even not counting the devastating effects of the pandemic--when staff are already overburdened due to continuing budget cuts, and when class sizes have increased significantly without financial support for readers, TAs, etc., it is counterintuitive at best and cynically irresponsible at worse to propose changes that would at every level require more financial and people-power resources. In light of the alarming budgetary situation, wherein the next few years will see even more belt-tightening, it makes no sense to pour resources into these proposed courses/degrees.

Our strenuous recommendation for caution is based on specific and solid evidence. In Fall 2018 the Faculty Welfare Committee (FWC) received the “Provost’s Task Force for Hybrid and Online Education final Report,” which sought to incentivize the creation of fully online courses here at UCR. They proposed the creation of 250 courses within 5 years. However, FWC noted that the university lacked the structural and financial infrastructure to develop these courses in a

way that would not place the onus on faculty. We were particularly alarmed that junior faculty might be tempted to develop such courses in order to meet departmental efforts to comply with the growth plan and that the lack of infrastructure would put them at professional risk. The preponderance of the task force's information was culled from non-research institutions and those otherwise below the caliber of UCR. FWC rejected the task force proposal as poorly researched and designed in terms of financial costs, time and energy resources, and implementation plans.

3. That we received this report at the same time that we are considering the "Crossing Boundaries: The New UCR General Education Curriculum" report suggests the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing, as these two groups of reports – i.e., a sweeping restructuring of undergraduate education and the proposal to allow for partial or fully remote degrees -- have sharply divergent motivations.

4. This task force was deemed necessary due to UCI's proposal for an entirely online degree in Business Administration. The strong belief of a number of CHASS faculty and the experience of some undergraduate students who have taken courses taught by the UCR School of Business is that Schools of Business seem to have different goals than other colleges. At the least, the such schools do not emphasize pedagogy and quality of the learning experience.

Indeed, degrees that could claim to be effective in a fully online environment would seem to be housed in schools/programs whose pedagogical mission is farthest from what a UC-quality degree is deemed to be. The motivations for proposing such degrees are, to at least some members of the CHASS faculty, suspect and would negatively affect students, the quality of their education, and the reputation of the UCs.

5. Because there was much concern about how UCI had attempted to create an online degree **without** Senate oversight. To "prevent 'stealth' remote majors from being developed without adequate Senate oversight to ensure the quality of the program", the task force recommends creating a divisional oversight committee, as well as a systemwide committee, should a degree allow or require more than 50% remote classes (Appendix I, p. 34). However, the first option of the very proposal we are reading allows for 70% of major courses and 70% of GE courses to be remote. This suggests that service burdens would increase at both the divisional and systemwide levels.

6. UCR prides itself as an institution dedicated to promoting a diverse student body and helping economically disadvantaged students achieve academic success. Thus, UCR should be very careful in considering developing online undergraduate programs and degrees, since it is precisely those low-income students who would be most challenged, financially and academically. Evidence, both anecdotal and from surveys strongly show that the remote learning of the Spring 2020 quarter, the summer sessions, and the current Fall 2020 quarter have posed significant challenges to students lacking the technology to access the online instructional materials in their courses. And all three options examined by the task force report would require significant, if varying, levels of infrastructural organization – and therefore would accrue financial costs. Programs whose foundational rationale are based on these two items have low graduation success rates, as well as low student satisfaction rates.

The oft-cited argument that students can save money through online instruction because they can stay at home, thus saving on room and board ignores the considerable costs of a quality online program and the lack of face-to-face interaction with instructors and advisers (see the full discussions of Appendices F, G, and H of the report). And among the students who would benefit most living on campus and direct personal contact with faculty are those who can least afford to forgo these experiences. In short, online degree programs may prove to be neither equitable nor economical.

7. A related issue is that the effectiveness of remote learning modes is mixed and often dependent on very particular groups of students. None of the information here pertains to completely online degrees; rather, it is based on individual courses. (See Appendix D, p. 14.)

8. Developing online degree programs and even individual online courses also make great demands on the faculty. While one may argue that the growth of online courses is inevitable, UC and any academic institution committed to quality pedagogy by its core faculty must deliberate carefully how more appropriate ways to assess faculty members' success in their teaching, research, and service in the light of more online teaching and most likely more research collaboration online. The task force was not asked to address these issues, but they should be examined in the future.

In sum, the task force report believes that more online classes and options were a clear trajectory for UC but want UC standards upheld. It thus had more reservations about Policies 2 and 3, as did the majority of the CHASS Executive Committee members. And one member stated: "Both at this time and in principle, I reject all 3 proposals, with my greatest resistance to #2 and #3. That said, I don't believe #1 is at all wise to undertake."