



School of Medicine
Division of Biomedical Sciences
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October 22nd, 2020

To: Jason Stajich, Ph.D., Chair, Academic Senate, UCR Division

From: Declan McCole, Ph.D., Chair, Faculty Executive Committee, UCR School of Medicine

Subject: SOM FEC Response to the *Online Degree Task Force Report*

Dear Jason,

The SOM Executive Committee reviewed the *Online Degree Task Force Report*. The FEC applauds the very detailed efforts of the Task Force to identify the potential benefits and concerns of an online degree program. We have a number of questions and concerns that we would welcome clarification on regarding the Online Degree Task Force Report.

1. There is a lot of information in this report regarding evaluation of outcomes – mainly based on community college students – but it was clear that students performed better in face-to-face (F2F) classes than in online classes. Those most disadvantaged were “Males, younger students, Black students, and students with lower prior GPAs”. Having identified these groups as being most vulnerable to the disadvantages of online learning, consideration should be given to upfront monitoring of their performance upon initiation of online learning programs.
2. We fully agree with the task force assessment that “we cannot adopt a model like that of ASU, in which a separate cohort of lower-wage instructors teach the online courses”.
3. There is also the danger – with some evidence at UCI – that some programs seek to migrate online without local or system-wide review by the Academic Senate. The task force recommendation that measures be put in place to prevent "stealth" remote majors from being developed without adequate Senate oversight to ensure the quality of the program is a very important consideration.
4. Some additional clarity on who will be the target audience for remote learning degrees would be welcome. For example, will online degrees be focused on California residents; non-state residents; a hybrid?
5. If students are required to spend some amount of time on campus (Plans 1 & 2), does this mean that students are expected to move here for 1 quarter of the year for 3-4 years?
6. What are the practicalities of this with respect to obtaining housing (renters may want a minimum 6 month commitment), students are presumably working while studying so do they have to quit their jobs for a quarter and hope they can retain or find new employment afterwards? *Cal-state has offered programs to accommodate the working student whereas the UC does not. Will it be emphasized that even a UC online degree program may not be a good option for the working student from that perspective?*
7. How will online UC degrees be judged if online graduates apply for on-campus UC graduate programs including professional schools (Medicine, Business, Engineering, Law)? Will they only be eligible to join fee-paying Masters programs? – *The FEC feels very strongly that the UC system - and UCR - have to set the example that we will accept online degree graduates to our graduate programs because if we don't, why should any other institution? This will place a burden on the*

new online degree programs to really emphasize UC-standard quality across the board for these degrees as they will essentially act as a gateway for graduates to either further their education or obtain better jobs than would have been available without a UC degree.

8. There was strong concern regarding barriers to access regardless of which plan is selected. With respect to plans 1 & 2, there was concern as to whether incorporation of an on-campus obligation will act as a barrier to access for certain students? This would argue in favor of option 3 from an equity & access perspective. Specifically, students who live in geographically isolated rural areas i.e. the Coachella valley) are disadvantaged because they can't commute to a UC (other rural areas of Northern California have even greater distance to UCs) and may not be able to afford housing near a UC (especially if they are expected to be on campus for part of a year then landlords may not be inclined to rent to them vs. students renting for a full year). To address this, will the UCs subsidize campus housing for students who cannot afford to rent?
9. Has any consideration been given to making accommodations for students who can't physically commute due to the aforementioned economic or geographic restrictions, perhaps they are caring for a family member at home etc.?
10. Concerns with access to the online degree programs also exist for those who do not have to spend time on campus (Plan #3) also exist. As exemplified by the current issues across the educational spectrum during the COVID-19 pandemic, not everyone has access to broadband etc. especially in geographically isolated areas or areas with poorer infrastructure issues i.e. Coachella valley. Will accommodations be made at either the UC or the state level to support or subsidize wifi access for those students?
11. With respect to the language in Policy 2 – the FEC suggests removing reference to a “small number” of programs and instead emphasizing the need to meet the high bar associated with a UC degree. Emphasize how improving infrastructure for this hybrid model could increase access (housing, broadband connectivity, devices, etc.).

Yours sincerely,



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School of Medicine