June 5, 2023

TO: Sang-Hee Lee, Chair
Riverside Division of the Academic Senate

FROM: John Kim, Chair
CHASS Executive Committee

RE: Revising R’Courses policy to allow graduate students to develop and facilitate R’Courses to undergraduate students

Having reviewed the memo and related documents regarding proposed changes to UCR’s R’Courses policy, we are in general supportive of the changes, which enhance curricular diversity at UCR and respond to a direct request from the Graduate Student Assembly (December 16, 2019), but had the following suggestions, questions, and concerns:

- Although we recognize that pedagogical training and curriculum development can fall within graduate students’ professional development within their capacity as students, we are concerned about how this change may further university practices of extracting labor without providing fair compensation. The request from the Graduate Student Assembly (Appendix 3) notes potential challenges associated with unpaid labor and specifically suggests the need to clarify proposed practices with the TA union. We strongly concur with the latter point, and believe that a report on this consultation should have been included in the final draft of the proposal.

- We appreciate that there are multiple levels of quality review both before the R’Course occurs and when it is offered. We are concerned, however, that the plan to bring graduate students who teach an R’Course into the faculty iEval system does not engage with the significant limitations and problems of that iEval system. The proposal to have the graduate student R’Course instructor also “submit a self-assessment at the conclusion of their course” may provide useful context that could be incorporated into a broader teaching assessment, but it is not clear how this self-assessment will be used.

- The Qualtrics surveys for proposing new R’Courses (Appendices 4 and 5) mention that the short course title must be less than 25 characters per Banner rules. Other curriculum
paperwork sets the limit at 30 characters and we call the R’Course committee’s attention to this detail.

- The new Qualtrics survey for graduate students proposing R’Courses (Appendix 5) ends with “*Note: We will use your Course Description as the advertising for your course, so make sure it is engaging and will get students interested in your topic. Remember, these are 1-unit introductory or survey courses and are meant to be engaging, not super rigorous! Have fun with it!” We recommend removing the statement about rigor, which promotes a false binary between engagement and rigor, and believe that existing curriculum review processes can effectively address situations where a course proposal misaligns with relevant curricular norms.

- Much of the framing for the new proposal involves graduate students needing more experience as primary instructors for professional reasons, with the points outlined in the policy largely about ensuring that the graduate students follow rules and perform well. These process and quality control details are important, but missing in the policy is recognition that PhD students can design and offer excellent courses that would not otherwise be taught at UCR, and that this is valuable service to the university’s mission. We encourage more intentional engagement with the latter and related points.