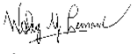




November 30, 2023

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

FROM: Wesley Leonard, Chair 
CHASS Executive Committee

RE: [Campus Review] Proposal: First Day Complete (FDC), an Equitable Access (EA) Program

The CHASS Executive Committee (EC), including its student representative members, engaged in a long discussion regarding this First Day Complete (FDC) proposal and left the discussion neither in firm support of nor fully opposed to FDC. We share the concerns of other campus stakeholders regarding course material affordability and support the idea of making costs predictable and directly linked to financial aid programs. We also appreciate the possibility of streamlined textbook purchases, rather than the status quo of students cobbling together textbooks and other course materials from various sources. Nevertheless, while we feel the basic intent of the proposal (i.e., to save students money) has merit, we have several concerns about its details and also urge consideration of alternatives to address the issue of affordability.

The CHASS EC's primary concern regards costs versus benefits of this program: the numbers presented in this proposal do not make a strong case for adopting FDC. Under the plan, an average courseload of 14 units would yield a cost of \$273. However, according to the UCR Textbook Access & Affordability Survey, only 11% of students spend more than \$300 on textbooks and materials. Indeed, for the 67% of students who report spending less than \$200 on textbooks and materials, the FDC clearly would not be a wise choice for them. (The value of the FDC to the remaining 23% of students who report spending \$201-\$300 is ambiguous). Thus, in its current form, the pricepoint offered by the FDC would seem to provide little value to most UCR students. For CHASS specifically, we considered several examples of current costs for EC members' courses; all were lower than what the proposed FDC cost would be.

Given the gap between the projected pricepoint in the FDC proposal and UCR students' reported textbook costs, the CHASS EC recommends that UCR formally explore UC Davis' model of an in-house textbook-provisioning system. In addition to engaging the cost concerns, such a system would provide UCR with a greater degree of local control over all aspects of the program. An in-house system could position UCR to take advantage of cost savings that would seem to be outside of the purview of a for-profit partner, such as resources that already have no direct costs to students. Examples include open-access textbooks, materials already paid for by other campus institutions (e.g., subscription-based journal articles or e-books paid for by UCR's libraries), and materials created by UCR faculty/staff. CHASS EC members identified several examples where such resources are already used, noting that in addition to avoiding expenses for students, use of these materials often incurs pedagogical benefits such as increased ability to incorporate the newest scholarship and to include a wider diversity of authors in course readings.

The CHASS EC identified several additional points for which we believe there needs to be additional information and consideration to make a fully-informed evaluation of the FDC:

- 1) In discussing the high pricepoint of the FDC program, the CHASS EC recognized that, in theory, students who would not benefit from the program could opt out. However, we have concerns about the associated details. First, the estimated opt-out rates included in the Executive Summary (30-40%) seem to be widely underestimated given the textbook costs reported in the UCR Textbook Access & Affordability Survey (i.e., 67% of students would not benefit from FDC). Second, given that the program requires opting *out* rather than *in*, we are concerned that people who do not wish to participate will still end up participating – thereby paying more than they would have without FDC – because they miss the deadline. The proposal's promise to communicate opt-out deadlines is vague.
- 2) The pay-per-unit cost model reflected in the FDC tacitly assumes that all courses require students to purchase instructional materials. However, there are many counterexamples. Beyond regular courses that require no materials or for which the materials are easily accessed without cost, some credit hours, such as those for research or training, do not correspond to normative courses at all. Such credit hours should be automatically excluded from the FDC cost. That said, even if both points are addressed, there remains a broader concern about the funding model: The idea of FDC seems to be predicated on sharing costs as an equitable collective, akin to a model of insurance where even those who do not use the system in a given moment still need to contribute to it financially in order for it to be sustainable. This conceptualization of the program is at odds with how it will be realized.
- 3) This proposal assumes best-case scenarios in details of course scheduling, staffing, and enrollment where, for example, courses are scheduled well in advance, instructors are

assigned and already employed by UCR (thereby equipped to adopt course materials early), and the courses for which students register before a term starts are the same as those they actually take. There is great variability in these and other details, thus raising several questions. For instance, how will FDC accommodate situations where instructor assignments occur late? Under the FDC, will a given course's materials be available to students who are waitlisted? If a student chooses to use FDC based on a plan to take courses with expensive materials but then is not able to actually get into those courses, will they have any recourse akin to returning purchased books for a refund?

- 4) The proposal lacks sufficient explanation regarding how the FDC costs will be annually evaluated and adjusted if the proposal is adopted. The CHASS EC calls for particular attention to limits on maximum allowable increases, and to how UCR will be engaged in the process of determining them.