COMMITTEE ON UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS

May 3, 2024

To: Sang-Hee Lee, Chair
Riverside Division

From: Peter M. Sadler, Chair
Committee on Undergraduate Admissions

Re: [Systemwide Review] Proposed Academic Senate Statement on UC Quality

The Committee on Undergraduate Admissions reviewed the proposed Academic Senate Statement on UC Quality at their meeting on April 19, 2024.

The statement on quality seems vague in what constitutes an acceptable level of quality and how it is going to be assessed. For example, one of the criteria is to “operate at an intellectual level appropriate to the high abilities of the student body.” Who decided what that level is and monitors and assesses the class to meet that criteria? Another criteria includes “develop interpersonal skills that will contribute to success through collaboration.” Does that mean that every class requires students to work in groups, and how will their interpersonal skills be evaluated?

If this quality statement is designed to ensure the quality of online classes, then the university does not need to reinvent the wheel, as there already exists ways to ensure that asynchronous online classes achieve a level of quality and accessibility and it might serve the university best to rely on these measures or at least derive more actionable objectives based on the work being done by these agencies. One that comes to mind is Quality Matters, which certifies classes as achieving a standard of quality through a rigorous review process: Quality Matters.

The Statement is explicitly aspirational (rather than descriptive). As such, it needs to be rather generalized. To be more specific and descriptive is to run the risk of omission.

It is disappointing to read that the document has already informed a presidential task-force on instructional modalities. Why was it not distributed for Senate review prior to that? The UCEP documents seem to have their origins in the budget difficulties of 2009-10. Has the cost-saving potential of on-line programs always been the underlying motivation? That is a sad aspiration. I hesitate to edit or approve a document that might be used to defend the imposition of on-line education.

The quality of a UC education is to be measured, in part, by the professional successes of our undergraduate alumni with UC degrees. For some careers, the necessary content of the degrees are prescribed by professional accrediting organizations: engineering and geology, for example. The
California State Board for Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, and Geologists requires that a geology degree include field experience that cannot be taught on-line. Otherwise, the degree is not an entryway to state registration. There are also necessary teaching materials for required laboratory courses. Perhaps the quality statement should recognize these realities. Perhaps the accessibility of California’s coasts, mountains and deserts to its campuses deserves mention. Should we worry that the document seems to avoid those elements of quality that cannot readily be satisfied on-line?

If the document is in part meant to ensure the quality of online education, it might need specifics about how certain elements (especially environment) will be translated online.