



Academic Senate

COMMITTEE ON UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS

September 4, 2026

To: Kenneth Barish, Chair
Riverside Division

From: Kelly Huffman-Neal, Chair
Committee on Undergraduate Admissions

Re: **[Systemwide Review] Proposed Accreditation Regulations**

While the Committee on Undergraduate Admissions did not reach a quorum to issue a formal committee response on the Proposed Accreditation Regulations, input was gathered from two members. Their comments on the proposal are as follows:

Upon review of the NPRM from Dept Education, there are some significant concerns facing UC generally and UCR specifically.

Noted threats to Academic Freedom/UCR decision making

In the document, “Non-germane” classroom speech (anything not directly pertaining to the subject matter) is explicitly excluded from federal academic freedom protections. For example, if a professor uses class time in a nonpolitical subject, something like calculus or chemistry, to talk about politics, the current administration could classify that speech as “non-germane.” This would allow the faculty member to be held responsible for misuse of class time. Since this ‘germane’ rules falls outside federal academic freedom protections, it means institutions could discipline or maybe even fire faculty (non-tenured) through “internal performance reviews” channels without violating federal academic freedom guidelines. While overt firing or for political speech in academia remains unconstitutional, this document introduces ways that faculty could be made more vulnerable.

These proposed rules require that University accreditors require colleges to conduct routine performance evals for all faculty. Again, while political speech can’t be listed as direct cause for firing, these type of “evaluations” could be negative and can note professional conduct or germane speech as cause for some kind of discipline. This document implies that if a university fails to conduct the faculty evals or follow the new ‘free-speech policies’, the university risks losing its accreditation, which would risk its ability to receive funding from the government.

Potential impact on UCR: For a public research university like UCR, these mandates might damage UCRs self-governance and the power that the academic senate has over faculty support, tenure, and even curriculum development. It may greatly a etc. institutional autonomy in addition to limiting faculty academic freedom and speech.

Noted threats to Diversity

The document says that accrediting agencies must require institutions to implement policies that support and promote intellectual diversity and the free exchange of ideas among faculty. This includes things like measuring student and faculty “perceptions” of expression of personal views. These policies represent a fundamental shift in how accrediting agencies evaluate universities. Under these new rules, the federal accreditation directly affects how universities deal with reports of faculty speech or views, faculty hiring, and academic freedom.

University audits are planned to attempt to measure “perception”. Institutions must develop ways to measure student and faculty perceptions regarding the range of academic perspectives present on campus (things like surveys or interviews). Accreditors then would need to inspect these measures to determine whether a university is complying with the ‘viewpoint diversity’. I think the idea is they want to see if polarizing views on one side of the aisle are dominating and whether the opposite polarizing views are not allowed.

The proposal states that DEI standards or guidelines will be prohibited. Accreditors are forbidden from maintaining standards that mandate, encourage, or permit institutional preference based on protected characteristics like race, ethnicity, or sex in faculty hiring, tenure, or student admissions. Proposed 602.17g explicitly prohibits accrediting agencies from having standards that "encourage, direct, or otherwise require institutions or programs to violate Federal or State law, including by having policies that provide any preferences on the basis of race". The Executive Order on which the document is based makes accreditors require improved program planning “without reference to race, ethnicity, or sex”. Interestingly, universities with an explicit religious mission are exempt from the mandatory intellectual diversity requirements, preserving their right to follow their faith-based doctrines.

Potential impact on UCR: UCR is a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) with a very diverse undergraduate population. These restrictions threaten UCR’s ability to assist disadvantaged students, which will likely reduce equity, and could impact student retention, mentorship, and support programs designed to close achievement gaps that may be related to diversity.

Noted threats to UCR operations and finances

The proposal severely tightens "separate and independent" rules which would reduce shared resources (602.14, 602.15). Accreditors would no longer be allowed to share resources, IT, personnel, or office space with other associations.

UCR’s professional programs (for example Bourns College of Engineering, School of Business, and Public Policy) rely on specialized accreditors. If these accreditors experience disruption because of the new regulations, increased costs, or loss of reputation/recognition, it could slow down accreditation timelines, increase compliance costs that would likely be passed on to UCR, or disrupt professional licensure tracks for graduates.

The rules make it easier for institutions to switch accreditors or hold multiple accreditors, eliminating geographic boundaries and removing the "two-year rule" for new agencies.

Noted threats to Undergraduate Students, especially Transfer Students

There is language in the document that requires accreditors to evaluate programs using strict metrics, such as post-grad earnings data and standardized test scores relative to the total cost of attendance. Evaluating educational value using things such as immediate economic returns can be problematic for liberal arts, humanities, social sciences, and public service majors. Undergraduates pursuing paths with high societal value but lower immediate post-grad pay (for example degrees in education or humanities) could see program funding or institutional support cut.

Transfer Students may be particularly impacted by this proposal. UC undergraduates frequently transfer credits from California Community Colleges (CCC) or other four-year colleges. Making standards less rigorous and encouraging "competition" among accreditors could lead to lower-ranked institutions becoming elevated in terms of federal recognition and funding. Undergraduates transferring into UCR may get here with credits from lower-tier accredited institutions that don't really prepare them for the challenging coursework at UCR. While the general idea is to make it easier to transfer credits between schools, it presents some clear risks for transfer students at UCR. Under the proposed 602.24e, accrediting agencies must require institutions to accept comparable transfer credits from any federally recognized accredited institution and prohibit denying credits based on the reputation or status of the school or its accreditor. UCR which gets most transfers via the CCC system hold tough UC-system academic standards. If we are forced to accept coursework from non-traditional or new accreditors the students could arrive here unprepared for how UC courses are taught. This could cause inequities, particularly in STEM fields.

Also, these rules may cause some delays in the overall transfer process. The document says that if an institution denies a transfer credit request, it must provide the student with a written justification detailing the rationale and offer a formal appeal process within 15 calendar days. Given UCR's high volume of transfer applicants, processing individual written justifications and managing super short appeal timelines could be a major problem for academic advising and admissions. This justification rule could lead to late degree audits, financial aid disbursements, and course registration for incoming transfer students.

Some of these changes could also lengthen time to degree for transfers. If students transfer lower-division courses under expanded credit-acceptance rules that do not align with UCR's upper-division major preparation, they risk taking advanced coursework without adequate foundational knowledge. This gap could possibly lead to higher course repetition rates, ultimately increasing the time and cost required to earn a degree.

Additionally, the proposed rules make it easier for schools like CCCs to switch accreditors or use multiple accreditors. If a transfer student's previous school frequently changes its accrediting status or switches to a new accreditor, evaluating transcripts to give credit for classes at UCR will become more complex and unpredictable.