

October 20, 2020

Shane White, Chair
Academic Senate

Re: Online Undergraduate Degree Task Force

Dear Chair White,

At its meeting on October 12, 2020, the Council on Planning and Budget (CPB) had an opportunity to review and discuss the Online Undergraduate Degree Task Force Report. Members were generally impressed with the thoroughness of the report, agreed that all three options have limitations, and offered the following comments and conclusions.

1. Option 3 seems an odd choice: There are clear standards for what constitutes a University of California degree and Option 3 explicitly indicates it would not fulfill those criteria. It is hard to see how this would not damage our reputation as an institution. In addition, members felt students are potentially limited post-graduation by fully online degrees. Some questioned if UCLA goes online does it mean that faculty members do not need to be at UCLA? Members expressed concern that the university community might be harmed by not having a unified physical space. Members agreed that the university is more than online classes: It is the full experience and goes beyond a physical space. It was also observed that successful graduate online programs might not pose the same sort of limitation for their students, as their students presumably have already had a foundational experience at the undergraduate level.
2. Option 1, in turn, seemed arbitrary and short-sighted about future changes to education. Foreclosing our ability to experiment and innovate seems like a bad idea in the long term.
3. Option 2 was preferred to Option 3, in that it explicitly called for UC standards to be upheld. However, it also presented issues, as members were skeptical that an online-only degree option could readily fulfill the University's high standards.
 - a. Members did note that during the pandemic, our instruction will continue to be remote for an unknown period, and we cannot conclude that the quality is poor. Some did endorse more widespread online options to better assist underserved populations, and believed we could build on our current innovations to provide a UCLA degree that does not require being on campus and demonstrably achieves UC standards of excellence.

- b. One member expressed support for Option 2 stating that online instruction presents new possibilities. For example, students in a department have been using an online software called “gather town” which allows for gatherings in small and large groups, and allows participants to wander around a virtual space in real time. The next generations will be even more similar to a conference-type environment.
- c. UCLA is still in the learning stages, trying to figure out the possibilities with online instruction; however, the power of creativity and ingenuity should not be underestimated. Some are hopeful we might be able to do amazing things in unexpected areas (and noted how much more challenging our online meeting would have been a decade ago) and should therefore be cautious about applying current standards to a rapidly-changing online environment.
- d. Others pointed out that there are many uncertainties and that the non-classroom experience cannot be simulated online, such as working on labs, as well as interactions outside of class.
- e. How can this be done well? It was observed that faculty may tend to idealize what is being done currently and not recognize the limitations of face-to-face teaching at a large research university. Having larger classes and fewer sections on campus also challenges UCEP’s ideals. Likewise, faculty would need to go through training to offer consistency in their online teaching delivery. The university might have an impetus to hire a new wave of faculty, with proven skills in online education.
- f. Members appreciated the report’s appropriate caution regarding the limited empirical evidence of the effectiveness of online education (particularly at comparable institutions and with good experimental designs). Some therefore advocated more experimentation and piloting, especially if those tests could target underserved populations that the university hopes to serve. As faculty at a research institution, we are excited by the prospect of generating—and being guided by—better evidence than is presently available.
- g. Therefore, **Option 2 seemed to be the most viable, future-looking option of the three (but also the most challenging to achieve).**

If you have any questions for us, please do not hesitate to contact me at groeling@comm.ucla.edu or via the Council’s analyst, Elizabeth Feller, at efeller@senate.ucla.edu or x62470.

Sincerely,



Tim Groeling, Chair
Council on Planning and Budget

cc: Jody Kreiman, Vice Chair/Chair-Elect, Academic Senate
Michael Meranze, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate
April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate
Elizabeth Feller, Principal Policy Analyst, Council on Planning and Budget
Members of the Council on Planning and Budget