

October 30, 2020

Shane White, Chair
Academic Senate

Re: Systemwide Item for Review: Online Undergraduate Degree Task Force Report

Dear Chair White,

At its meeting on October 7, 2020, the Council on Research (COR) had an opportunity to review the Online Undergraduate Degree Task Force Report. After an initial discussion and overview, members expressed the following comments and concerns:

We applaud the efforts of the Task Force in completing a thorough, data-driven, inclusive and comprehensive review of the remote degree educational landscape. It is evident that many of the concerns brought up at our Council discussion had been identified by the Task Force. Your work clearly outlined a number of options for consideration, all evidently crafted to accommodate different levels of remote learning.

Our Council agreed that remote classes are and will continue to be important as part of the educational repertoire of tools. We acknowledge that remote learning degrees are viable options to accommodate flexibility on scheduling, provide cost savings to students, and promote access to education. However, our Council strongly opposed a move for institutions like UC or UCLA to offer remote learning degrees. Many undergraduate degrees emphasize requirements for research experiences, formal laboratory, field training, and performing arts practices, which would not lend themselves to remote learning. The learning experience is a complex mixture of lectures, practical learning, student interaction that promotes social growth, mutual teaching and learning, and opportunities for spontaneous collaboration.

Furthermore, the structured and very isolating effect of remote learning, coupled with additional barriers due to lack of access to adequate internet bandwidth, computer and camera equipment, and limitations in access to on-campus resources available to other in person degree seekers, further creates an unintended opportunity for the emergence of a two-tier degree system. Given the conclusions of the task force report, which highlight the limited cost savings but the increased financial and administrative/educational burdens to faculty, in addition to the disparities in availability of online degrees in certain areas of research, we propose that the Task Force take a stand against these online degrees.

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

Sincerely,

Julian Martinez, Chair
Council on Research

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