

Disabled Student Union Response to the Academic Senate

Updated March 9th, 2022

Dear Academic Senate,

While we appreciate your apology, commitment to dialogue, and acknowledgement of inclusive education as integral to academic excellence at UCLA, we are dismayed by the continued lack of concrete action being taken that would create this inclusive environment *now*, especially as it relates to such time-sensitive matters. Further discussion without action fails to deliver results to students who are at-risk themselves, or living with individuals who are at-risk, for contracting COVID-19; stalled action in the name of discussion forces students to make decisions that place their own and their loved ones' safety and well-being in jeopardy. There are a number of other, non-COVID-19 related reasons that point to universal dual modality being incredibly beneficial, as we have discussed at length. As students, we should be able to focus on our studies and commitment to academic research and performance. Instead, we are forced to continuously shoulder the burden of advocating for changes that are not materializing in time to protect the UCLA community, especially its most vulnerable members. As we emphasized in our most recent meeting, action must be taken now.

As paid decision-makers with great institutional power, we call on the Academic Senate to **immediately** take responsibility for removing this burden placed on students, one we battle while struggling to maintain our health and well-being. The sheer number of UCLA students and student workers (both graduate and undergraduate) who support our demands compared to the number of professors who object to dual modality clearly show that the DSU is asking for the most equitable policy solution. As you know, we are in consultation with disability rights lawyers from multiple organizations and are **fully prepared to “say go” if no progress is made in the next few weeks.**

Moreover, for faculty, lecturers, and teaching assistants, having to adjust modalities with little notice is disruptive to the educational process. We have seen time and time again that waffling and taking our time leads to an additional burden on the entire UCLA community. Starting to implement dual modality now, though more work in the short term, will allow for those in teaching positions to adjust for future calls for remote learning (as was done by Administration in March 2020 and January 2022). It will be the much needed push toward universal access we've been asking for since August 2021.

Further, through feedback received from students (as also mentioned in our most recent meeting), there are imminent deadlines for students to receive access to their course materials for Spring quarter. **Immediate action is needed** to enable BruinCast for classrooms that have the capacity for this technology. Shockingly, professors have to request BruinCast services for the Spring 2022 quarter by **today** (Wednesday, March 9th and the middle of Week 10), and if they miss this deadline, their requests may not be handled until Week 1 or 2 of next quarter. The lecture halls and classrooms that have the capability for audio and/or video recordings and/or

livestreams are already listed on the BruinCast website and should have those capabilities automatically enacted¹. Enacting all BruinCast systems now at the very least increases access to those in eligible rooms with little to no cost to those in teaching positions.

Additionally, we would like to remind you that our demands for access include not only undergraduate students, but graduate students, student workers, and faculty/lecturers; we expect that every one of these groups be explicitly included in any and all future discussions.

Below are specific responses to many line items from your revised letter. Those we have not explicitly addressed have already been discussed (i.e. they remain consistent with your last letter), fall more under the requests/jurisdiction of USAC, or will be discussed in our upcoming meeting.

1.2

This statement must endorse the use/sharing of recordings and/or live streams for students who are absent for **any reason**, as well as remote exams (which Administration has specifically discouraged). Moreover, DSU leadership must be able to read and approve the BruinPost before it is distributed. This BruinPost must also include guides for how to use BruinCast (if it is equipped), what Zoom assistants are and how to request them, and how to livestream / record lectures using Zoom. There must also be guides on implementing dual modality for lab/performance courses. Many DSU members have expressed a willingness to advise on the creation of these guides and implementation of ‘teach-ins’ in order to educate professors on this technology and its importance; this offer still stands, with the specification that we will serve as *consultants* on the development and implementation of these materials, although we are open to dedicating more of our time and resources if fairly compensated.

1.3

We need a deadline, much sooner than May 31, 2022², for the cost and needs assessment for BruinCast audio and visual technology, as well as the current capacity of said system (including Zoom assistants). Within the cost assessment, there must be evaluations for providing extra compensation for professors, lecturers, and teaching assistants for implementing dual modality in their classrooms. For technology that *does* exist, the above system should be instituted and guidance must be sent to all faculty and students on how to access their rooms’ capabilities, including how to request a Zoom assistant. Moreover, as implied future deadlines for requesting the use of BruinCast must be abolished; faculty should be able to access BruinCast at any time.

1.4

DSU expects to receive a copy of the principles produced by the end of Spring Quarter 2022.

1.5

DSU looks forward to receiving a copy of the developed processes. Additionally, clarification regarding why policies would be “possibly” implemented in the foreseeable future, rather than surely, would be appreciated.

1.6

These meetings must also include discussions of and commitments to advocating for extra compensation for faculty, lecturers, etc who implement dual modality.

3.1

As mentioned in the opening of this letter, our hybrid access demands are inclusive of, but not limited to, undergraduate and graduate students, student workers, and faculty/lecturers. DSU is proud to be comprised of both undergraduate and graduate students and therefore, we request the meeting invitation of both the GSA Vice-President of Academic Affairs and the Director of the Academic Senate and Academic Affairs, both housed under the Office of Academic Affairs.

3.2

To reiterate what has been repeatedly communicated by DSU: no amount of advocacy or advisement in order to facilitate in-person class attendance will ameliorate the barriers that disproportionately affect the disabled student population. As we have continually stated, the *only* way to equitably mitigate this issue is to remove any and all forms of punitive attendance requirements. Doing so will ensure that (1) students are not revealing personal information or diagnoses to get an excused absence (which often is rarely granted, and almost never allowed retroactively) and (2) that all students affected by other institutional barriers (e.g. being physically unable to navigate campus, working full-time to support yourself) will be fairly treated.

3.3

This cultural shift must come from you. As we’ve witnessed with past accessibility legislation, it took disabled people risking not only their reputations, but their literal bodies in order to have those in power change policy, something you witnessed us do just a few weeks ago. UCLA prides itself on being the #1 public university in the US, proudly showing off the ‘diversity’ of its campus and student body. However, our disabled community is consistently excluded from campus activities, faced with various inaccessible campus buildings and locations, and prevented from equal access to a UCLA education. Culture will not change without a concrete push to do so, in the form of enforceable policies that disallow professors from being inaccessible and perpetuating ableism in higher education. Student culture surrounding dual modality is progressing, and thousands of students have expressed support for this change, but professors, Administration, and you, the Academic Senate, have barred it from happening. We need to universally implement dual modality **now**.

4.2

Although we appreciate the more in-depth look at what academic freedom is in general, and where the documents it stems from, **nowhere did you reference which tenants of academic freedom are being violated by mandating dual modality instruction.** In fact, in your letter you stated “In March 2020, the pandemic forced Chancellor Block to close the campus to in-person teaching and learning for health and safety reasons on an emergency basis.” This assumes that the university has, and has wielded, the power to violate academic freedom. (Once again, we are left unsure if and how this violation occurs, given the lack of concrete policy details.) Case in point, according to the CDC’s latest numbers, the 7-day average for new COVID-19 cases as of March 2, 2022 is ~53,000; during the entirety of Spring quarter 2020 (when we were suddenly pushed online), the 7-day average was at or below 30,000. The Academic Senate should have been mandating continued remote access to courses this entire time, but has refused to do so on the basis of “academic freedom,” despite it’s (claimed) violation being clearly justified and supported by the University in the past. If you are truly committed to seeing change in this area, you must prioritize student needs and lives over non-specific “policies” that are contradicted by your own words and actions¹.

4.3

As stated previously, DSU is composed of both graduate and undergraduate students, and our advocacy work therefore is on behalf of both student populations. Please be sure to include GSA in all future systemwide developments in this area, in addition to USAC and DSU leaders.

We were interested to learn of the systemwide nature of academic freedom policies in Academic Senate’s letter to DSU³ on 2/28/22, considering there has been discussion of academic freedom violation due to mandating dual-modality long before we received this letter.

Given this new information that has come to light, we request that any and all relevant contact information of members within the systemwide Academic Council be shared with DSU.

Addendum

We appreciate you clearing up terminology. Know that in our advocacy, we are fighting for universal dual modality / hy-flex. We will continue to use “hybrid access” as a synonym because we have been doing so for 6+ months, so know that if/when we use that term, we are referencing our demands for universal dual modality.

We look forward to meeting with you before the end of Winter Quarter 2022.

Signed,
The Disabled Student Union at UCLA (DSU)

1: Please see <https://teaching.ucla.edu/bruincast/for-faculty/> and particularly the sections below:

DOES USING BRUINCAST CHANGE HOW I TEACH MY CLASS?

Not really. The BruinCast service is designed to be hassle-free and unobtrusive. In general, you can conduct your class sessions as you ordinarily would.

For your classes to be recorded properly, you must wear a wireless lavalier microphone during every class session. This small microphone is easily clipped to your shirt, collar or lapel, and is connected by a thin cord to a transmitter that you put in your pocket, clip to your belt or carry. The microphone is supplied to you at no cost by Audio Visual Services (AVS) for use throughout the quarter.

Most video recordings and all audio-only recordings are accomplished with permanently installed equipment that you or your students will not even be aware of. For some video-recorded courses in rooms without a remotely controlled camera, a video crew will attend each of your class sessions and record them from the back of the room.

You can use slide presentations, write on the whiteboard/chalkboard, conduct demonstrations, move around freely, interact with students and otherwise teach your class like you always do.

WILL A LOT OF STUDENTS WATCH THE LECTURES ONLINE INSTEAD OF ATTEND CLASS IN PERSON?

Published research has consistently shown that making recorded lectures available to students results in little or no negative impact on classroom attendance.

According to past surveys of UCLA students, the majority used BruinCast as a study tool during the quarter, particularly before midterms or finals, or to watch/listen to a lecture they had a legitimate reason for missing. The large uptick in streaming traffic before midterms and especially finals also suggests students often review all or parts of lectures to prepare for tests.

2: Chancellor Gene Block, Student Requests – Response to Feedback, 11 Feb. 2022. TS.

3: UCLA Academic Senate Leadership, Academic Senate Leadership Response to Undergraduate Students, *updated*: 25 Feb. 2022. TS.