

February 28, 2023

REPORT OF THE FUTURE OF INSTRUCTION TASK FORCE

UCLA is at a Crossroads. After three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty are overburdened, increasingly alienated, and finding it more difficult to continue their research, teaching, and service in the face of ever-increasing demands.¹ Students, having had their learning disrupted by the loss of a full residential experience and the necessity of more isolated remote learning, are understandably desirous of a deeper engagement with their education. Indeed, in light of a continuing health crisis, the question of access and disability justice has been linked as never before. The Disabled Student Union, in particular, has highlighted the ways that the pandemic made manifest the continuing challenges that disabled students (and others) face in gaining access to their education. The problem of genuine instructional access is real and must be met, and the Academic Senate is eager to engage with it in a thoughtful and ongoing manner. At the same time, we emphasize that genuine access demands that the quality of both teaching and research be maintained.

To make matters worse, the impact of the pandemic built upon long-standing structural challenges facing the instructional and academic programs at UCLA. As a recent University Committee on Planning and Budget report revealed, Senate faculty hiring has not kept pace with either student growth or administrative hiring at UCLA or throughout the system. The result is an increase in the student/faculty ratio.² This increased ratio reduces the attention that faculty can give to their students and therefore undermines the learning process. At the same time, the increased demands in terms of grading, email, etc. reduces the ability of faculty to engage in their creative activities, scholarship, and scientific investigation. The overall effect is to reduce the quality of teaching and learning at UCLA. The recent academic student employee contracts pose new challenges to the nature of graduate funding and education. To the degree that the University displaces costs by increasing demands on PIs or decreasing the numbers of Teaching Assistants the burdens on faculty will further increase and the difficulty of sustaining the inclusive excellence of instructional programs will become greater over time.

The simple fact of the matter is that these two developments--enlarged instructional demands and decreased faculty resources--are contradictory trends. UCLA cannot maintain the quality of its academic programs if in the face of enlarged student demands and decreased faculty resources. Ultimately this is a question for the administration: do they wish to maintain the academic quality and integrity of UCLA's research and teaching? If they do, they will need to provide the necessary resources as pointed out in the Executive Board's Faculty Rebuilding and Renewal Initiative.³

It is with this understanding of the challenges facing UCLA that the Future of Instruction Task Force (FITF) took up the charge of the Executive Board to "to review current policies and priorities about teaching and learning at UCLA through the lens of the Principles for the Future of Instruction (PFI)."⁴ We examined the current Senate policies and procedures (understanding that both Undergraduate and

¹ <https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/reports/sc-md-2022-uc-faculty-survey.pdf>.

² <https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/reports/sc-md-report-on-faculty-hiring.pdf>, 1,5,7.

³ <https://dms.senate.ucla.edu/issues/issue/?6635.Faculty.Rebuilding.and.Renewal.Initiative>.

⁴ Charge letter.

Graduate Councils are reviewing them themselves) as well as discussing the general challenges to the implementation of the PFI.⁵ In the end, we concluded that the challenge facing the Senate, faculty, and instructors lay less in changing specific Senate policies than in transforming campus discussion about the place of academics on campus. Thus, although we do have some specific suggestions, our main approach is to discuss what preparatory steps need to be taken in order to begin implementation of the PFI.

I. Put academics at the center of campus and instructional planning

First, as the Academic Senate earlier this year [advised](#) the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost about the draft UCLA Strategic Plan, the campus needs to place the UC academic mission of research, teaching and service at the heart of campus planning and just as importantly place academics at the heart of planning for instruction. Too many decisions are made without asking this fundamental prior question: in what way does this benefit the academic mission and in what other ways could resources be deployed to benefit the academic mission? Although we recognize the importance for students of co-curricular activities, we are concerned about the long-term drift of services out of academic departments towards centralized student services. The distribution of resources between academic and non-academic enterprises must be reexamined. We recommend this effort as a priority to the Council on Planning and Budget (CPB).

II. Place research and scholarship at the center of undergraduate instruction in a more systematic way

UCLA is a large research university. Undergraduates who choose UCLA as opposed to a smaller liberal arts institution pass up a more personal academic setting to have access to that research world. It is incumbent on us then to fully integrate the practice and analysis of research into their educational programs. UCLA must find better ways to connect faculty research to course instruction. Labs are, of course, one obvious way to do this; seminars and capstones another. But programs need to be encouraged to rethink how best to prepare students to take advantage of those research-driven opportunities. There can be no one size fits all version of this effort. But all students should have the opportunity to develop the skills that they need to participate meaningfully in research in their chosen fields of study. Research skill acquisition should be integrated purposefully throughout their course of study.

One possible approach: highlight the question of student research, scholarship, and creative activity in the requirements for program proposals and program review. This effort would fall under the authority of the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils.

III. Enable experimentation from below

In order to achieve these twin goals--increased focus on academics and increased connection between research and teaching--the Campus needs to encourage experimentation from below, i.e., experiments generated for educational purposes by instructors. Although campus wide strategic planning is helpful, centrally organized initiatives frequently fail to account for their effects on the units charged with implementing them. Moreover, it is those most closely connected to scholarly developments who are best placed to determine where intellectual initiatives should take place. In order to do this, faculty should be enabled, not discouraged, from devoting time to course

⁵ <https://senate.ucla.edu/news/principles-future-instruction>.

experimentation (e.g., it should be granted greater importance in personnel reviews), the Administration should make resources available for faculty to initiate cross-departmental teaching without their units suffering (a continual problem with the financing of the cluster courses), and an acceptance of failure must be integrated into any process of review. Within the Senate, these are tasks that might be taken up not only by the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils but also by the Council on Academic Personnel, Council on Research, CPB, and Committee on Data, Information Technology, and Privacy.

This emphasis on experimentation from below is particularly important relative to decisions surrounding course modality. Faculty and instructors should be empowered to explore different teaching modalities when, *in their judgment*, they would enhance the learning experience. In cases of faculty initiative, the Administration should provide the needed technical and instructional support: whether it be in the form of information technology assistants, teaching assistants, or the availability of appropriate classroom technology. But attempts to impose these choices by administrators or through administrative teaching and learning centers to respond to increases in enrollment or favor particular types of pedagogy would undermine both faculty authority in the classroom and override the pedagogical experience and knowledge of instructors.

IV. Address problems of inclusive excellence

One overriding concern of the Task Force has been the challenge of UCLA's increasing access to learning without reducing the quality of *either* the learning that is offered to students *or* the scholarship that serves society. UCLA cannot directly address the inequality of resources provided to students in K-12 education. But we do need a strategy that enables all students to participate effectively in all fields of study. This may entail a rethinking of GE requirements. It may entail the development of more effective on ramps to majors and the ability to participate in research. But the emphasis should be on strategies to enable students to effectively develop the skills they need in their chosen fields of studies regardless of the unequal opportunities of their high school educations.

V. Resources must be provided to ensure that faculty can fulfill their duties in a sustainable manner

As we noted in our opening, the size of the faculty has not kept up with the increase of students (nor kept pace with the expansion of Administration). The result has been an increase of the student/faculty ratio. This result is *exactly opposite to what is desirable for a research university that is committed to both its students and its scholarship*. Indeed, the desire to provide more active learning experiences for students requires a lower faculty student ratio than presently exists. Active learning has been shown to be pedagogically strong and helps promote inclusive excellence. Nor will the expansion of online teaching provide an answer to this dilemma. For one thing, it is deeply labor intensive and expensive if done correctly. And, for another, as UCEP pointed out there is a difference between "logistical accessibility" and "seat availability." The former points to means to lessen the problems of commuting or travel that may be important to different populations of students. But that does nothing to increase "seat availability" understood as the number of students in a course that can be taught appropriately.⁶ Indeed, *the experience of online teaching suggests that it is most effective when the student/faculty ratio is low*. Moreover, inclusive excellence means that all students have access to the full range of experiences offered by a residential institution. In other words, movement

⁶ <https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/reports/sc-ucep-white-paper-online-degrees.pdf> , 11.

forward on teaching is only possible with increased faculty devoted to both teaching and research. In this way, the Future of Instruction is inseparable from the work of the new joint task force on Faculty Rebuilding and Renewal Implementation. This linkage has been made clearly at the systemwide level as well by Robert Horwitz, the immediate past chair of the Academic Council:

Many students want more individualized approaches, and they may not be aware how much extra work it is to teach well in dual modality. Faculty who have taught in hybrid mode attest that it is more than double the work of teaching a course in a single modality: the issues are not simply technological but rather involve fundamental course design, assessment, equity across modalities, participation, interactive teaching and learning, and more. Some faculty are open to discussions about moving toward greater accommodation for course recording and teaching modality. However, quality remote instruction is expensive and this cannot happen without a serious commitment of resources from campus administrations. Without additional investment in resources and more faculty hiring to provide this 'individualization' mode of instruction, the University is diverting a faculty hired to conduct research, teach, and provide service to a very time-consuming effort in instruction alone. This is not consistent with the comprehensive needs of an R1 University system.⁷

Although advocating for these resources is clearly a task for the Executive Board it also falls under the purview of both CPB and the Faculty Welfare Committee (FWC). Indeed, we think that this may be the central issue facing FWC over the next several years: how best to protect faculty from the never-ending increase in administrative demands for new procedures, increased classroom numbers, and auditing.

VI. Graduate education

So far, we have focused largely on undergraduate education. In part, that is because the emphasis of the PFI lay with undergraduate education. But more importantly it is an acknowledgement that graduate education at UCLA is in the midst of a crisis. Whatever one thinks about the particulars of the recently concluded graduate student strike, it is clear that it grew out of long-standing difficulties in the funding and sustainability of graduate education. These issues will play themselves out differently in different parts of the campus. And proposing solutions is beyond our remit. But we do think that it is important that the Executive Board take a firm position that the financial burdens of the contracts should not fall on academic departments alone and that the campus needs to find means to protect PIs from having their research undermined. This is an opportunity to rethink graduate education. It may take time to do so. But the academic departments and faculty creative activity, research, and scholarship must not be collateral damage of this process.

We thank you for the opportunity to opine on these issues and look forward to discussion with the Executive Board.

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⁷ <https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/reports/rh-md-response-to-calls-for-universal-hybrid-instruction.pdf>