

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE NARRATIVE EVALUATION SYSTEM FROM THE UCSC ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

We—current and former leaders of the UC Santa Cruz Alumni Association, members of the UCSC Foundation Board, and a former Regent of the University of California—are writing you in support of the Narrative Evaluation System (NES), to be considered at the November 27 Senate meeting.

The alumni of the university have strong opinions on the NES. We are concerned that this next decision comes too soon after the recent, lengthy discussion of mandatory grades. The decision for mandatory grades changes the dynamics of the debate. We believe that adequate time is required for a thoughtful discussion of the new situation.

We are in a unique position to represent UCSC graduates. Over the past year we have heard from hundreds of alumni about the value of the NES to their academic experience. We have also found a high level of support for narrative evaluations among current students. Many alumni and students told us that the NES was one of the key reasons they chose to attend this UC campus. Alumni continue to believe that the NES contributed to their success at UCSC and to their subsequent careers.

During the discussion of mandatory grades, alumni representatives have communicated with nearly the entire faculty about this issue. Just as the faculty members have graciously considered our views, we have carefully considered the arguments being made in opposition to the NES. Now that the campus has instituted mandatory grades, it can no longer be argued that the NES penalizes students. While we understand the workload issues and the structural problems with the NES, we believe two things: (1) that the benefit of the NES far outweighs any detriment, especially in light of potential enhancements (noted in the October 19, 2000, Committee on Educational Policy report AS/SCP/1290-1) that can significantly reduce workload concerns; (2) if there are problems with the NES, they can, and must, be solved.

On the first point, we continue to believe that the NES exemplifies best practices in student assessment. The Narrative Evaluation System:

- embodies the university's commitment to the highest quality undergraduate education
- fosters a challenging learning environment
- provides meaningful feedback to students and to future reviewers of students' academic performance
- combats grade inflation
- recognizes students whose work exceeds expectations
- rewards group effort and teamwork
- describes academic achievement and improvement to academic performance that cannot be adequately represented by a letter or number
- provides qualitative feedback and specific, constructive suggestions on how every student can improve
- supports academic risk-taking by students

- prepares students for future careers where written evaluations have become the standard for performance review

In short, the NES supports Ernest Boyer's recommendation—in the Carnegie Foundation's *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*—that faculty “give students careful and concise criticisms (that) help them understand the strength and weaknesses of their performance.”

On the second point, we believe that the NES as currently practiced is flexible enough to suit the needs of any particular discipline or course. Faculty members who do not value narrative evaluations can produce textual equivalents of their grade books. Faculty members who do value narratives can write whatever they deem useful for their teaching and their students. We hope that your decision-making process will provide for consideration of proposals to meet the needs of the faculty during preparation of the NES, while leaving the NES in place.

UCSC alumni remain committed to this outstanding university. In our view, narrative evaluations are an essential part of what makes UCSC unique. We therefore hope that the Academic Senate will preserve and seek to revitalize the NES. We are confident that your deliberations will result in a rich, multifaceted student assessment system consistent with faculty workload requirements.

Respectfully Submitted,

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