

May 10, 2010

Lori Kletzer, Chair
Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

Dear Chair Kletzer:

Re CPE response to Commission on the Future Recommendations

The UCSC Committee on Preparatory Education (CPE) has reviewed the March 2010 First Round of Recommendations of the UC Commission on the Future (COTF). I also had the chance to discuss the recommendations with the chairs of other campus CPEs at the University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) meeting in Oakland on April 23; our comments are substantially in agreement with those of UCOPE members.

Our committee focussed on recommendations we see as potentially affecting the area of our charge. As you know, our committee is concerned with students who must complete courses necessary for declaring majors and advancing towards graduation. These students often face severe challenges, including underfunded K-12 education, being the first in their family to attend college, and using English as a second language. A recent article in the *New York Times* notes a disturbing trend: while the number of teenagers who enroll in college nationwide has been rising steadily, graduation rates have fallen, and “the most important factor seems to be student preparation.” If the University of California is serious in its commitment to diversity, it must attend to the needs of these less privileged and less prepared students.

We found it difficult to respond to the COTF report because the recommendations are generally very broad and unspecific, and because some recommendations by the different working groups conflict. We are also very concerned that important decisions might be taken without adequate Academic Senate involvement, and strongly urge that no decisions be made before fall.

Our responses in the order of the recommendations:

Size and Shape recommendation 1: We question the idea of increasing the number and proportion of non-resident undergraduates, a recommendation which seems driven primarily by economic motives. We believe that UC should reaffirm (in both theory and practice) its commitment to California students—which we note is the first recommendation of the Access and Affordability working group.

Education and Curriculum recommendation 1: CPE does not believe that encouraging students to attempt to finish in three years is in their best interest, with the exception of students who have unique personal circumstances that demand haste (and such students can already try to do this on their own impetus). Only the brightest students would be able to complete such an accelerated program without risk of failure. Since incoming students regularly have an exaggerated idea of their own abilities, many would try for this program and make a hash of their undergraduate education unless extremely high academic standards were set for entry. The students who would meet this standard, however, are also those who are best able to benefit from the extraordinary opportunities we offer as a research institution: sitting in on graduate seminars, doing research under faculty guidance, etc. It would be impossible to make time for

such opportunities in a three-year program. Therefore it appears that such a program would deprive average to good students of guaranteed progress and a good GPA, and would deprive excellent students of all the best opportunities that UC could afford them, making this a good idea for no one.

We are also concerned about the very brief mention of “alternatives for entry level courses (e.g., math and writing requirements”). We ask that such alternatives be spelled out and their consequences carefully analyzed.

Education and Curriculum recommendation 2: We are very concerned about the emphasis on online education in “developmental” courses, a topic central to our charge. Here again no details were offered (for example, it is not clear whether this means online learning as a component of a course, or fully online instruction). Committee members commented that extensive research has demonstrated that first-year composition cannot be taught effectively outside the context of small, seminar style courses that offer ample opportunity for attention to large-scale rhetorical and critical strategies. They also note that basic mathematics courses such as Math 2 and Math 3 lay a foundation for the calculus series while also teaching students to think analytically. At UCSC the calculus series is a requirement for most Physical and Biological Science and School of Engineering majors, and some Social Science majors. Students who are enrolling in classes lower than calculus at UCSC already show some indications of inadequate mathematics preparation from high school, and we feel that making introductory mathematics classes on line will only widen the gap.

CPE members worry that offering fully online classes will negatively impact the most educationally challenged students at UC, and are likely to lead to graduating students less well prepared students in science and mathematics. We note that more EOP students are enrolled in Math 2 and 3 than non-EOP students. It does not make educational sense for the University to detach itself from the direct responsibility of teaching less privileged and less prepared students and passing on the responsibility to an on-line system. To do so is likely to result in a less-diverse student body or, in light of reduced retention, less-diverse alumni. We note that the examples of “quality offerings” online courses cited in the recommendation are products of wealthy private schools hardly comparable to UC. Finally, we note that gateway courses introduce students to University culture and guide them to majors and careers; high-quality in-person instruction is far more effective for these purposes.

We strongly urge that the issue of online courses be treated with great care. In particular, we insist that all proposals for such courses be given the same rigorous Academic Senate review as in-person courses.

We look forward to hearing more details from COTF. Meanwhile we will look carefully at the report forthcoming from the Academic Senate Special Committee on Remote and Online Instruction and Residency, and at resources available through the Community College system.

Sincerely,

/s/

Mary-Kay Gamel
Chair, Committee on Preparatory Education