RE: Disability Resource Center (DRC) Access to Canvas Proposal Request

Dear Lucy,

The Academic Senate has reviewed your request for the Disability Resource Center’s (DRC) proposal to have access to Canvas. The following committees have responded: Affirmative Action and Diversity (CAAD), Educational Policy (CEP), Information Technology (CIT), and Teaching (COT). The responding committees appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback for this important proposal for our campus.

All committees noted the immense responsibility of providing students with accommodations with the course materials they need in a critical and timely manner. Committees were sympathetic to the DRC’s laborious efforts in producing alternative materials for students. However, it is uncertain that automatic access will mitigate the issue of timeliness. CIT states “faculty update their course materials at various times throughout the quarter. Members raised concerns that without prior communication with the instructor, DRC staff could potentially obtain and begin to work on incorrect or outdated materials, which would create additional burden for the DRC, instead of lessening the work.” Similarly, COT warns “faculty often don’t have materials posted and finalized for course work until the start of the quarter, and often make adjustments as the term progresses.” Due to the time constraints on instructors and faculty who are creating the course content, it is not clear that automatic access would help provide materials quicker for students. Further, it should be noted there are still about 30% of faculty and instructors on campus that do not use Canvas. What would be the alternatives for these courses?

Committees also expressed caution regarding automatic access given to the DRC. CEP asked if the DRC is requesting access “to all courses in Canvas, to all courses in Canvas where any student has accommodations, or only requesting access when there are accommodations related to alternative media.” While CIT did not have concerns about DRC being granted access to their courses automatically, they did question, “whether the DRC would have access to all of Canvas, including grades.” Meanwhile, CAAD expressed apprehension about granting automatic access “given the history of institutional surveillance via Canvas during the COLA strikes” and “creating inroads for administrative interventions into classroom spaces, including Canvas.”

Finally, we agree that there needs to be better information and communication to faculty and instructors requests regarding roles, responsibilities and compliance for students with accommodations. CAAD “would like to see more robust practices aimed at eliminating non-compliance among faculty” and “encourages increased education for faculty regarding their obligations to provide accessible and equitable education, regardless of whether they use Canvas heavily or not.” CIT echoed, “Although automatic enrollment of DRC Support Specialist Staff may be a helpful tool, it should not at all replace effective communication with faculty and
instructors. As such, additional considerations should be made to improve communication and instructor response times.” More importantly, the Senate observed that automatic access would not eliminate the need for communication between the DRC and instructors and remains essential for “promoting strong and sustained collaboration” (COT).

The Senate welcomes further clarification regarding the outlined questions as posed by our responding committees. Background and contextual information between committees was shared, but it would have been more equitable and comprehensive if the additional information from Online Education (OE) and Information and Technology Services (ITS) had been included in the proposal materials. We recommend that any future proposal should include consultation with the Center of Innovation for Teaching and Learning (CITL) and Online Education (OE) to determine what these units on campus are already doing to mitigate making materials more accessible and creating best practices for our entire campus. We have enclosed all committee responses for you to see their specific recommendations. Thank you again for sharing this important proposal with the Academic Senate.

Sincerely,

David Brundage, Chair
Academic Senate

Enc: Senate Committee Responses (Bundled)

cc: Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Chair, Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity
    Tracy Larrabee, Chair, Committee on Educational Policy
    Peter Alvaro, Chair, Committee on Information Technology
    Catherine Jones, Chair, Committee on Teaching
    Isabel Dees, Associate Vice Chancellor Equity and Equal Protection
    Rosa Garcia, Interim ADA Officer, Equity and Equal Protection
    Vanessa Molina, Auxiliary Services Manager, Disability Resource Center
    Stephanie Nielsen, Product Manager, Information and Technology Services
    Jim Phillips, Digital Accessibility and Equity Lead, Information and Technology Services
    Tom Thompson, interim Director, Disability Resource Center
    Jody Greene, Associate Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning
    Michael Tassio, Director, Online Education
    Matthew Mednick, Executive Director, Academic Senate Office
Re: DRC Request for Access to Canvas

Dear David,

The Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity (CAAD) has discussed and reviewed the request for enhanced Disability Resource Center (DRC) access to Canvas. After receiving further details that clarified the scope of the new proposed access roles, CAAD focused on the question of whether this solution will resolve the issue of equity for disabled students that it seeks to address. We echo CEP’s concern that providing access to Canvas will not eliminate, or necessarily lessen, the need for students to consult individually with instructors. CAAD was not clear why the request was issued from the Division of Student Affairs and Success rather than from the DRC.

CAAD was initially concerned about protecting instructor autonomy as well as student privacy, as Canvas is more than a library of instructional materials: it is a classroom community that facilitates sometimes candid conversations that do not typically involve non-class members. Given the history of institutional surveillance via Canvas during the COLA strike, the committee is wary of creating inroads for administrative interventions into classroom spaces, including Canvas. To address these practical/pedagogical and privacy issues, we echo CEP that access to Canvas is best approved by instructors, but that granting DRC staff viewing access for non-compliant faculty who miss necessary timelines is an acceptable interim approach.

The policy mentions both “negative impact on students’ academic progress” and avoiding “liability for the university” as motives for the new access policy. The committee is indeed concerned with how these delays are impacting students, but this automatic external access to Canvas access without instructor approval is only needed when faculty do not comply with deadlines to provide these materials. Therefore, CAAD would like to see more robust practices aimed at eliminating non-compliance among faculty. (To be clear, by non-compliant, we mean faculty who are given ample notice of what is needed and fail to respond, understanding that it is not always possible to respond quickly once the quarter has begun. We also don’t assume that non-compliant faculty necessarily doubt the need for accommodations.) Providing the DRC access to Canvas may be a temporary work-around for the problems created by such non-compliance, but ultimately it might be a good idea to articulate and enforce consequences for faculty who disregard their legal obligations as outlined on the DRC website. The committee encourages increased education for faculty regarding their obligations to provide accessible and equitable education, regardless of whether they use Canvas heavily or not.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Chair
Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity
cc: Yat Li, Chair, Committee on Courses of Instruction
    Tracy Larrabee Chair, Committee on Educational Policy
    Peter Alvaro, Chair, Committee on Information Technology
    Kate Jones, Chair, Committee on Teaching
David Brundage, Chair
Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

Re: DRC’s Request for Access to Canvas

Dear David,

The Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) reviewed the request for the Disability Resource Center (DRC) access to Canvas on January 26, 2022. CEP members are very sympathetic to the workload and time constraints under which DRC employees work. Members are uncertain if the DRC is requesting default access, broadly, to all courses in Canvas, to all courses in Canvas where any student has accommodations, or only requesting access when there are accommodations related to alternative media. We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this with representatives of DRC further.

Members agree that DRC staff who have to produce alternative materials need the time to do so in a timely manner, given the importance of alternative media to the academic success of students who need this accommodation, and a 49-day delay in these materials as mentioned in your request is clearly not acceptable. CEP members wonder whether receiving access via Canvas or some other mechanism would be most effective since receiving course materials in a timely manner is crucial. However, members have the impression that the majority of accommodations are related to extended time on course activities (exams, quizzes, projects, and the like), and the argument that the DRC puts forward doesn’t apply to those accommodations. Furthermore, members have pointed out that not all course materials are distributed via Canvas: Instructors sometimes distribute materials in class (sometimes by showing a film or video), and not all instructors use Canvas as their primary website to distribute materials to students. Members conclude that the DRC should not automatically be given access to any course that does not host a student who needs alternative materials as one of their accommodations (though they can always ask instructors to be added for other reasons). Furthermore, it seems there is no way to avoid communication with individual instructors.

Right now, there are two Canvas roles relating to the DRC or alternative materials production: DRC Support Staff and Accessibility Review. Both of those roles provide access to all course materials available on Canvas. In short, it appears that mechanisms that address DRC concerns are already in place on Canvas. The only problem could be getting instructors to add DRC staff to each Canvas course. Is the DRC asking to be permanently added to all courses or automatically added to some courses? Asking an instructor to add a member of the DRC to a course before the quarter begins does not seem like an undue burden.

Members believe that the DRC request should be resubmitted with a more complete description of exactly what they are requesting, since appropriate mechanisms already exist.

Sincerely,

Tracy Larrabee, Chair
Committee on Educational Policy
cc:  Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Chair, Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity
     Peter Alvaro, Chair, Committee on Information Technology
     Catherine Jones, Chair, Committee on Teaching
     Yat Li, Chair, Committee on Courses of Instruction
February 16, 2022

David Brundage, Chair  
Academic Senate

Re: Disability Resource Center (DRC) Access to Canvas

Dear David,

During its meeting of February 2, 2022, the Committee on Information Technology (CIT) reviewed the Disability Resource Center (DRC) proposal for DRC access to Canvas for the purpose of supporting student accommodations. The committee endorsed providing DRC with access to the course materials, and suggested that it would additionally be helpful if the DRC could manage extra time for Canvas quizzes. However, the committee strongly felt that providing this access will be no panacea for the current workload issues facing DRC, and that Canvas access should not replace effective communication with faculty.

We note that we were provided with additional information for this review from the Committee on Teaching (COT), which included helpful background and context information¹, and information on the current permissions for two different roles used for supporting accessibility in Canvas: DRC Support Staff, and Accessibility Review². This information was extremely helpful in CIT assessment of the proposal, and our committee would have liked to have seen similar supporting documents provided by the DRC in the official review materials. We hope that such supporting documents will be included in future review requests from this unit.

From the proposal and the additional COT documents, CIT understands that if the proposal is approved, a new “DRC Support Specialist Staff” role will be created in Canvas, and automatically enrolled in Canvas courses where students request accommodations without the instructor having to add the DRC to their Canvas course. In general, CIT members raised no concerns about the DRC having access to general class materials. Indeed, the DRC already has access to class rosters, and members expressed appreciation for DRC assistance, and noted that in terms of working with the DRC, faculty operate from a point of trust. However, members questioned whether the DRC would have access to all of Canvas, including grades. If so, this would be good to know.

Members additionally questioned whether approval of this proposal will lead to an expectation that everything be handled through Canvas, and recognized that some faculty do not use the platform at all. Further, CIT recognizes that faculty update their course materials at various times throughout the quarter. Members raised concerns that without prior communication with the instructor, DRC staff could potentially obtain and begin to work on incorrect or outdated materials, which would create additional burden for the DRC, instead of lessening the work, which CIT assumes is one of the goals of this proposal. The DRC will need to contact instructors ahead of

¹ AVP Greene to COT Chair Jones, 1/26/22, Re: Some Feedback on the DRC Proposal  
² ITS Director Kern to AVP Greene, 1/26/22, Re: Some Feedback on the DRC Proposal
time in order to ensure that the course materials in Canvas are up to date. Although automatic enrollment of DRC Support Specialist Staff may be a helpful tool, it should not at all replace effective communication with faculty and instructors. As such, additional considerations should be made to improve communication and instructor response times.

In addition to providing the DRC with access to course materials so that they may be transferred into alternate formats, there was interest expressed during our review discussion in having the DRC manage additional time allowances for Canvas quizzes for those with accommodations and inform the instructor accordingly. Members noted that it would be helpful for faculty if this did not have to be done manually.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback.

Sincerely,

Peter Alvaro, Chair
Committee on Information Technology

cc: Tracy Larrabee, Chair, Committee on Educational Policy
    Catherine Jones, Chair, Committee on Teaching
    Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Chair, Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity
    Yat Li, Chair, Committee on Courses and Instruction
February 15, 2022

David Brundage, Chair
Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

RE: DRC’s Request for Access to Canvas

Dear David,

The Committee on Teaching (COT) has reviewed the Disability Resource Center’s (DRC) Proposal for Canvas access for DRC. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this important policy and look forward to further collaboration with DRC on this issue. COT appreciates the workload and timing challenges of preparing course materials in appropriately accessible forms for DRC students and supports the DRC’s efforts to find ways to streamline the process in order to support students’ learning. We can envision ways in which it might be appropriate for DRC staff to have access to courses in canvas, but we think the policy needs some refinement before we can fully support it.

Our primary reservation is that it remains unclear whether canvas access would address the workflow challenges the DRC is seeking to remedy. As discussed in our consultation, not all faculty use canvas (about 30% do not) and further, they use it in variable ways (e.g., sometimes linking to other sites where materials are housed). Further, faculty often don’t have materials posted and finalized for course work until the start of the quarter, and often make adjustments as the term progresses. For this reason, it seems to us that communication with faculty remains essential for making sure the DRC is processing the right material and avoiding unnecessary work. We recognize that individualized communication is laborious and sometimes does not result in timely responses, but we think communication between instructors and the DRC is essential for promoting strong and sustained collaboration. We suggest working with the Center for Innovations in Teaching and Learning (CITL) (e.g., via the CITL newsletter) and perhaps also chairs and heads of course sponsoring agencies to help set expectations about timing of communication with DRC, the importance of timely responses from instructors, etc.

If the DRC does determine that access to canvas course sites will expedite the process of preparing course materials COT encourages DRC to consult with Information Technology Services (ITS), and Online Education (OE) about ways the access and duties of DRC staff might be scaled to fit the task (i.e., restricting access to the course site to necessary materials). In a related vein, we encourage DRC to think about how best to communicate the scope and purpose of this access to instructors, some of whom may have concerns about classroom autonomy and the potential for surveillance of their instruction. We also encourage DRC to explore how it might collaborate with CITL, the Senate, and perhaps other administrative bodies to share information about best-practices regarding formatting course materials with instructors. While this would not address the needs of some students, helping faculty understand how to prepare materials in desirable formats might help reduce the burden on DRC.

Thank you for your efforts to seek efficient and effective ways to support students’ access to course materials. We welcome further consultation and collaboration as you pursue this goal.
Sincerely,

Catherine Jones, Chair
Committee on Teaching

cc: Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Chair, Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity
Yat Li, Chair, Committee on Courses of Instruction
Tracy Larrabee Chair, Committee on Educational Policy
Peter Alvaro, Chair, Committee on Information Technology
Jody Greene, Associate Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning
Michael Tassio, Director, Online Education