

April 11, 2022

RICHARD HUGHEY
Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education

Re: Commencement of Academic Activity

Dear Richard,

The Academic Senate has reviewed your correspondence regarding the Commencement of Academic Activity and request for feedback on the updated campus plans for the implementation of quarterly verification of commencement of instructional activity for each student and course.

The report also included a request for faculty volunteers from each responding committee who are teaching during spring to pilot and critique the Activity Roster and the syllabus quiz. These are included here and have been submitted separately to VPDUE Hughey and UR Sanger:

Committee on Educational Policy

- Elisabeth Cameron, History of Art and Visual Culture
- Tracy Larrabee, Computer Science and Engineering
- Alan Christy, History

Committee on Teaching

- Robin Dunkin, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
- Albert Narath, History of Art and Visual Culture

Graduate Council

- Andy Fisher, Earth & Planetary Sciences
- Brant Robertson, Astronomy & Astrophysics

In regards to the specific question posed about the Default Syllabus Quiz in CANVAS, CEP supports the syllabus quiz (that is able to be modified) to be the primary mechanism for instructional activity. CEP also supports the notion that the quiz should be automatically published for all courses, as it helps to remove the burden for instructors. CIT seconds CEP's concern about faculty workload, which has been considered, and appreciates that the proposed solution is designed to minimize new workflows required by instructors, as requested by CIT.

CIT was happy to see that the primary instructor can now administratively drop students for non-attendance during the first week. This is a welcome development, and will help instructors manage the Commencement of Academic Activity issue. There is a concern however about the proposal to use CANVAS, and the campus Learning Management System (LMS), to automatically verify instructional activity using a default quiz. This is a good option for instructors to have, and we expect some faculty will decide to use it to automatically complete the Instructional Activity Roster. However, CIT strongly disagrees with the proposal to automatically load the quiz into CANVAS. As the VPDUE notes, this would mark a new practice on campus, one with significant impacts on academic freedom and instructor autonomy.

In the committee's view, there are two issues at stake with regard to quizzes that are automatically loaded into a course LMS. The first is that it violates the instructor's sole control over all course materials. The second is that automatically linking MyUCSC/AIS grade rosters to the campus LMS potentially removes the instructor's affirmative participation in the process. While it is certain that many faculty will welcome the ability to easily load grades from CANVAS into AIS, an automatically-linked system risks cutting the instructor out of the process. Members also noted frequent examples of students whose initial attendance and progress are poor, but who turn their performance around after a few weeks and successfully pass the course. Automatically dropping students for not completing a click-through task during week one would result in students being dropped who might otherwise pass the class.

The letter also requests feedback on the content of the question. CIT had an involved discussion, which included the perspectives from the committee's student representatives. Our current comments in a sense reiterate CIT's concerns expressed in our original response of April 30, 2021.

As this proposed quiz will be the very first pedagogical activity a student will engage with at the beginning of a course, it risks setting a tone of compliance, not education. This might have repercussions on the classroom climate, and certainly contributes to the infantilization of our students. At worst, an automatic syllabus quiz risks turning the syllabus into nothing more than another example of a universally loathed and ignored Terms of Service agreement. CANVAS, and the LMS in general, is a pedagogical tool and should not be used for exercises in compliance. Automatically loading such a quiz into CANVAS course shells is absolutely unjustified in terms of pedagogical best practices.

Graduate Council noted the need to have consistency across classes in how commencement of academic activity is recorded/verified. While bigger classes might have bigger impacts, GC found the quiz option likely to lead to greater consistency across different courses. GC advised that the easiest option is to have the quiz pre-loaded into CANVAS. However, GC noted that because not all instructors regularly use CANVAS or might be familiar with all of its options, this might require some training for instructors who do not use CANVAS. GC strongly advised that any training or instructions for instructors should be as simplified and user-friendly as possible (e.g., a one-page document with clear step-by-step instructions to review and not multiple pages of a document and certainly not a training video). Council also wondered if there are any legal ramifications or responsibilities if faculty don't report or if faculty make a mistake in their reporting. It appears that the Office of the Registrar will remind faculty of the need to complete the roster, but it was not clear to GC how errors might be handled. Lastly, Council wanted to know more about the responsibilities of graduate students in their capacity as TAs and GSIs.

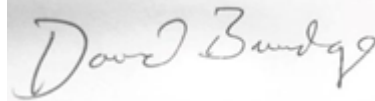
COT supports the syllabus quiz as suggested and believes that having this automatically published would reduce the burden on instructors. However, COT has additional questions:

- Wouldn't the instructor need to publish the CANVAS course in order for students to access it?
- If the instructor doesn't use CANVAS, will this be an effective way to record commencement of activity on behalf of their students? We understand that about 30% of faculty do not use CANVAS.
- Could you provide clarification for how long the quiz will be available and what happens to students who are late adds?

- If required, what happens to courses that don't use CANVAS? What are the alternatives for instructors? How will this information be reported?

The Academic Senate appreciates the opportunity to review the progress report and provide feedback.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Brundage". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

David Brundage, Chair
Academic Senate

cc: Michelle Whittingham, Associate Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management
Patrick Register, Director of Financial Aid and Scholarships
Tchad Sanger, University Registrar
Matthew Mednick, Executive Director, Academic Senate
Herbie Lee, Vice Provost, Academic Affairs
Peter Biehl, Vice Provost and Dean, Graduate Studies
Byron Walker, Interim Vice Chancellor, Information Technology and Strategic
Technology Initiatives
Tracy Larrabee, Chair, Committee on Educational Policy
Peter Alvaro, Chair, Committee on Information Technology
Catherine Jones, Chair, Committee on Teaching
Melissa Caldwell, Chair, Graduate Council