

November 19, 2021

Herbert Lee, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Office of the Chancellor

RE: Online Programs Initiative Final Report

Dear Herbie,

The Committees on Admissions and Financial Aid (CAFA), Education Policy (CEP), Planning and Budget (CPB), Teaching (COT), and the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) have reviewed the final report for the proposed Online Programs Initiative (OPI) final report. We appreciate the time, thoughtfulness and thorough approach the charter group took to examining UC Santa Cruz's readiness and ability to initiate online degree programs. The Senate applauds those that participated in the subcommittees, as it was clear that maintaining UC quality education was a priority, spanning beyond just the classroom. The review of the OPI final report was also influenced by the December 8, 2020 Systemwide Review of the Report of the Online Undergraduate Degree Task Force (enclosed), where our division noted hesitation and concerns about whether our campus could *and should* implement online degrees. This question, like the one posed in the cover letter requesting feedback on whether our campus should "proceed with [the] development and formal proposal of online degree programs", was at the center of our committees' reviews, discussions, and responses.

To begin, multiple committees remarked on the lack of a comprehensive method of reading the individual reports. As COT notes, "In the absence of a coherent overarching vision and sufficient funding, however, we also see potential pitfalls in their development." Similarly, CEP also commented, "that taken together, the reports did not articulate a coherent vision for online degree programs, nor did they indicate central administration's commitment to resources. That is, while each subcommittee report provided us with principles and options to consider, as well as practical approaches we might take to mount online degree programs, the overall package of materials left members wondering if UC Santa Cruz is ready to make a unilateral decision about this initiative." We believe that a strong, clear vision is absolutely necessary for our campus planning for resource and curricula development and assessment.

Additionally, CEP and CPB both raised the complicated issue of discussing online degree programs as a panacea to UC Santa Cruz-specific challenges in what CPB lists as, "available and affordable housing; lack of classroom space; impaction with in-demand majors; limited parking; and inadequate resources for staff and faculty FTE to keep pace with and serve the present and growing student population." Both committees warn that there is danger in developing online degree programs as a response to campus wide problems and issues, but rather the principles of online degree programs should be kept separate from what CEP sees as "fixing problems related to classroom space and impacted majors." CEP further notes, "Online degree programs should be leveraged because the *discipline* and/or *major* lends itself to an online educational experience." CPB echoes this point and recommends that "the campus establish the UC research and teaching mission as the first and paramount principle to be upheld in creating these programs."

CPB clearly asks the question that all other committee responses raised: “Can UCSC afford to dedicate the resources necessary to develop and deliver a UC quality online-degree program while also stabilizing and strengthening (and in some cases growing), its existing programs?” We are specifically interested in how the administration will provide resources to departments and programs that will be contributing to, and impacted by, the development of online degree programs. We do not see how revenue neutrality and sharing is feasible. CAFA warns, “This collaboration will be crucial to ensure that resource requirements are completely enumerated. It is also crucial that resource estimates are realistic, rather than making optimistic requests only to realize later that the program requires additional faculty, advising support, or other resources.”

In the conception of online programs, we cannot separate the resource implications, concerns and questions from equity and co-curricular issues. COT notes, “We are also concerned about the ability of the campus to resource online programs in a way that supports holistic, wraparound support for students and faculty participating in these programs.” CEP also remarks that while the Student Experience Report stated that the same services will be provided to online students as in-person, “we are unclear precisely how this infrastructure will be developed and how the campus intends to support such an infrastructure.” CAFA further elucidates the challenges associated with creating appropriate support structures. They state:

Furthermore, it is not clear to CAFA that current in-person students have sufficient access to support services such as advising, CAPS, financial aid, or career services. If these support services are not sufficiently funded even to meet the needs of current in-person students, it seems that developing a two-tier model of support (with separate services for in-person and online students) might end up diverting resources from already-underfunded offices. Perhaps this provides an opportunity to develop better and better-funded programs that serve all students more effectively, whether in-person or online... However, it is difficult to envision how online students will have the same opportunity to build community, participate in the full range of extracurricular activities, and make social connections, either among themselves or especially with students who are interacting with their peers in person.

Additionally, in creating two systems of support, there was an overall theme and concern regarding the unintended impact on diversity, and the consequences of creating a two-tiered educational system that would disadvantage marginalized students. The Senate has not been provided with enough data to assuage our concerns. Lastly, all of our committees recommend that the assessment process must be an integral aspect of developing any online degree program beyond the initial proposal, resting largely within the purviews of CEP and CPB, but also welcoming additional Senate committee consultation. The recommendations for assessment include analysis of potential impact on existing programs of study, students’ sense of belonging and experience, and graduation rates.

This brings us to another related issue where the Senate holds plenary authority. It is within CAFA’s right to not only hold online students to the same criteria as in-person students for admission, but even to place additional qualifications or emphasize additional factors in admitting students to online degree programs, depending on where the literature on student success and our

eventual experience leads us. They note, “CAFA constantly strives to balance access, justice and equity, and student success, and reserves the right to set admission policies at any time.” Additionally, COT and CEP identified significant questions regarding curricula more broadly. COT points out that, “online degrees often require accessory courses beyond those offered by faculty directly involved in a particular program, which can lead to pressure to shift more courses to online modalities in other programs.” How will departments and programs be supported in maintaining their curricula planning and oversight? Furthermore, COT recommends that, “it will be important to explain whether/how students will be able to move between an online degree program and an in-person one, given that the decision would have repercussions beyond individual online degree programs.” Similarly, CEP calls attention to the question of General Education requirements. “The reports do not mention how students will meet their general education (GE) and other degree requirements in fully online degree programs. We see this oversight as important: In order for a fully online degree program to work, students must have access to a range of GE as well as other enrollment options in an online format.” Finally, SEC discussed how challenging it will be for online students to have full access to the rich research opportunities that are a key dimension of the UCSC undergraduate experience. We welcome plans of how these issues will be addressed.

In closing, the Senate appreciates the time campus has spent exploring the viability of *faculty initiated* online programs whether in the format of degree completion or fully online undergraduate programs. However, we remain unconvinced that the required strategic vision and planning has been fully realized and developed, and as COT notes, how it situates “within the university’s larger mission.” They astutely remark,

We are also concerned about the ability of the campus to resource online programs in a way that supports holistic, wraparound support for students and faculty participating in these programs. If the university pursues the development of online degree programs, we see a need for a clear, centralized vision of their place within the university’s larger mission in order to develop sustainable programs that address the unique challenges of online degrees. Without such a vision, we are concerned that departments will be left to serially reinvent the wheel and that larger concerns that cut across departments like advising and academic integrity will be inadequately addressed.

We understand that the draft of the Creative Technologies B.A. proposal is expected to be with the Senate for full review in the winter. We applaud the articulation of CPB’s principles and believe they need to be at the forefront in our minds as we contemplate the creation of online programs. Additionally, we also support CEP’s recommendation that if the B.A. is to move forward, it should be done on a smaller scale so that proper assessment can be determined prior to large-scale investment. We are cautiously hopeful that our review and concerns regarding the Online Programs Initiative Final Report will serve as a necessary framework with guiding principles in providing vision, resources and structures to ensure and maintain a UC quality education and promote success for our campus. It is with this framework that the Senate will review all future proposals for online degrees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Brundage". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light gray rectangular background.

David Brundage, Chair
Academic Senate

Encl. Committee Bundle Responses
UCSC Response to Systemwide Undergraduate Online Degree Task Force Report, 12-08-2020

cc: Lori Kletzer, Campus Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor
Richard Hughey, Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education
Michael Tassio, CoS Academic Affairs and Director for Online Education
Alex Brondarbit, Academic Planning Analyst
David Smith, Chair, Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid
Tanner Would Go, *pro tem* Chair, Committee on Educational Policy
Dard Neuman, Chair, Committee on Planning and Budget
Catherine Jones, Chair, Committee on Teaching
Matthew Mednick, Executive Director Academic Senate

November 10, 2021

DAVID BRUNDAGE, Chair
Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

Re: Online Programs Initiative Report

Dear David,

On September 29, 2021, the Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid (CAFA) discussed the Online Programs Initiative report. We also convened a subcommittee to examine the five subcommittee reports in more detail, and finalized our feedback at the November 10, 2021 meeting. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on these documents. Our comments will include topics squarely in CAFA purview, but we also had a more expansive discussion about fully online programs, and we will summarize some of our broader thoughts as well.

First, on a subject directly related to CAFA's charge, the Mechanics and Practicum report suggests that "*Admissions standards for students should be the same regardless of program modality.*" While this principle seems to be a reasonable starting point for admissions practice, CAFA reviews the process annually and we cannot bind the actions of a future CAFA. It also seems nearly certain that CAFA will not be willing to admit students to online degrees who would not be admitted to an in-person program. However, the reverse may not be true, and a future CAFA may support different or more stringent requirements if the literature shows that more maturity or other noncognitive strengths are required to succeed in an online program. CAFA constantly strives to balance access, justice and equity, and student success, and reserves the right to set admission policies at any time. CAFA will also want to see evidence that proposed online programs will not have the unintended effect of reducing overall diversity (online and in person) in the students served by the proposing department, or create a two-tier system with lower-income students who might have been able to attend in person opting instead for the online degree.

On the broader issues, CAFA does not want to stand in the way of faculty groups who feel that a fully online degree is the best choice for their discipline. However, degree programs require contributions and resources from units outside of the sponsoring department(s) or program(s), for example: other departments, the colleges (particularly for students who begin as frosh), academic support units, and administrative offices. To the extent that online degree programs require different resource contributions from an in-person degree, it seems that any proposal will need to be completed collaboratively by the faculty and relevant administrative units. This collaboration will be crucial to ensure that resource requirements are completely enumerated. It is also crucial that

resource estimates are realistic, rather than making optimistic requests only to realize later that the program requires additional faculty, advising support, or other resources.

The finances document raises the issues of revenue neutrality and revenue sharing, but we feel that framing is not an appropriate lens for a state-funded undergraduate program (in contrast to professional or self-supporting graduate programs). For one, no in-person degree programs are held to a standard of revenue neutrality, and they should not be held to that standard. We feel that the decision about a new degree program should be based on whether the program's value to students, and in achieving our educational mission, are sufficient given the resources required.

The documents also note the need to provide sufficient support to online degree students, particularly to mitigate concerns about lower completion rates, and student success more generally, in online programs. Providing adequate student support is, of course, fundamental to achieving our goals as an institution. One important aspect is faculty effort, and it will be important to evaluate whether effort dedicated to sustaining an online degree would detract from the student experience in existing in-person degrees. This can be assessed during Senate review of the proposal, but should also be monitored on an ongoing basis after program approval. CAFA suggests that CEP engage in a separate and dedicated process of annual evaluation of new online programs.

Equally important are student support programs; however, the models outlined in the documents seem substantially more resource-intensive than the current allocations to student support. For example, a 100:1 student:advisor ratio is substantially better than most, and perhaps all, majors on campus. Furthermore, it is not clear to CAFA that current in-person students have sufficient access to support services such as advising, CAPS, financial aid, or career services. If these support services are not sufficiently funded even to meet the needs of current in-person students, it seems that developing a two-tier model of support (with separate services for in-person and online students) might end up diverting resources from already-underfunded offices. Perhaps this provides an opportunity to develop better and better-funded programs that serve all students more effectively, whether in-person or online.

On the subject of curriculum and co-curricular activities, it is clear that online classes can be designed effectively to provide a learning experience comparable to in-person instruction. We have also learned during the pandemic that one-on-one research with individual faculty is also possible remotely, even if only certain types of projects are feasible. However, it is difficult to envision how online students will have the same opportunity to build community, participate in the full range of extracurricular activities, and make social connections, either among themselves or especially with students who are interacting with their peers in person. It is possible that some or even many online students may have less interest in these aspects of the college experience, by virtue of choosing an online degree and perhaps if they are a mature student with an established social network. However,

our campus should decide if a degree providing comparable educational but likely-subpar extracurricular and social opportunities is in keeping with our values for a UCSC degree.

More broadly, we see a number of tensions between the stated goals of developing online degrees. Online degrees would only meaningfully increase our enrollments and/or reduce strain on the physical campus if the degrees are in areas of high student demand. However, that high student demand typically results in those departments being strained by attempting to meet current teaching and mentoring needs, and faculty seem unlikely to have enough bandwidth to develop and launch a separate online degree pathway in a large major. It seems more likely that online degrees, which should be bottom-up proposals initiated by interested faculty, will be in more specialized areas that would likely attract a passionate, but smaller, group of students. It is possible that the overlap of a specialized area with the subset of prospective students interested in pursuing an online degree would be too small to be viable, although a sufficiently distinct program may draw students nationally or internationally.

We also note that many of the points raised in the documents refer to online courses, for example for degree completion programs, rather than fully online degrees. We recognize the significant benefit in having a selection of online courses that can provide students with flexibility, particularly in degree completion. Perhaps UCSC could carve out a distinct niche in the online space by spearheading systemwide coordination of online degree completion programs in which the course development effort was distributed among multiple campuses. A distributed effort would be a highly efficient use of resources to provide a substantial benefit for students who need nonresidential degree completion, particularly if it could be done for high-enrollment majors. However, these benefits are distinct from having fully-online degrees, and the two are at times confused in the documents.

Proposing departments and/or the administration may cite references to successful programs (for various definitions of success) at other institutions. Senate review should take care that such comparisons are really relevant -- a well-funded and highly selective private institution will have more resources for student support and less need for them. A large program (like that at Arizona State University) that hires a separate set of faculty for online programs and achieves economy of scale that way is explicitly deprecated by the systemwide Task Force's report.

We end by noting some skepticism that the value of online degree programs, to students and to the institution, will justify the higher cost of launching and sustaining such majors. We also wonder if students and the institution would gain equal or more benefit by devoting the same funding towards improving in-person instruction and the university's traditional mission. It will be crucial to fully describe the benefits to the students and institution, and to fully account for the costs across the institution. If online degrees are proposed, we also agree with the recommendation that programs begin only for transfer students. Students entering as frosh could pursue the major, but would have

the residential experience for the first year or two before transitioning to the fully-online curriculum in later years, mitigating some of the more challenging problems of providing the extracurricular and social experience. An online degree for transfer students can still serve the desired population of mature students who do not or cannot move to Santa Cruz. Similarly, transfer students have already demonstrated success at the college level by completing the required courses for transferring, so the concerns about student success in online degrees may be less acute. By having the fully-online component only in the upper-division curriculum, it also reduces the need for the colleges and other departments to develop online materials to support the program.

Sincerely,

/s/

David Smith, Chair

Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid

cc: Senate Executive Committee
Tracy Larrabee, Chair, Committee on Educational Policy
Dard Neuman, Chair, Committee on Planning and Budget
Catherine Jones, Chair, Committee on Teaching

November 4, 2021

David Brundage, Chair
Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

Re: VPAA's Online Programs Initiative Final Reports

Dear David,

With Chair Larrabee recused, the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) reviewed the Online Programs Initiative Report Executive Summary and accompanying subcommittee reports. Overall, members were impressed with the thoughtful and thorough approach the charter group took to assess the campus's readiness to offer online degree programs. Specifically, we appreciate the attention given to students' material conditions as well as the group's emphasis on creating equitable educational experiences in online spaces. Moreover, it is clear to members that the charter group approached this initiative with students' educational needs in mind, and we value the opportunity to comment on the report.

We want to begin by addressing VPAA Lee's memo, which calls for feedback "on the decision to proceed with development and formal proposal of online degree programs." In evaluating the subcommittee reports as a whole, CEP noticed that, taken together, the reports did not articulate a coherent vision for online degree programs, nor did they indicate central administration's commitment to resources. That is, while each subcommittee report provided us with principles and options to consider, as well as practical approaches we might take to mount online degree programs, the overall package of materials left members wondering if UC Santa Cruz is ready to make a unilateral decision about this initiative.

Thus, CEP does not support the campus's move to offer fully online degree programs at this time. However, the committee is amenable to a small-scale pilot program, such as the one afforded by the potential Creative Technologies degree. Below, we explain our rationale and offer a proposal for the charter group to consider.

Rationale

Two reports, "Student Experience" and "Finances," were the most helpful in offering us a glimpse of the potential costs for online degree programs and how student fees may be reconfigured. Still, we still have concerns about how students will be equitably supported in online programs in comparison to their on-site peers. While the principles in "Student Experience" dictate that "the same services" should be provided to students in online programs as provided to on-site students, we are unclear precisely how this infrastructure will be developed and how the campus intends to support such an infrastructure (p. 5).

Additionally, we noticed that a couple of the reports discussed online degree programs as a panacea to UC Santa Cruz-specific challenges, something CEP takes issue with: The purpose of online degree programs should not be used to fix campus problems related to classroom space and impacted majors (e.g., "Marketing" and "Mechanics and Practicum"); instead, online degree programs should be leveraged because the *discipline* and/or *major* lends itself to an online educational experience. In other words, departments seeking to develop online degree programs should do so because the subject matter and the curriculum would be more effectively

administered and/or delivered in an online format. As a result, we caution the campus against launching an initiative to solve problems unrelated to online education.

Further, the reports do not mention how students will meet their general education (GE) and other degree requirements in fully online degree programs. We see this oversight as important: In order for a fully online degree program to work, students must have access to a range of GE as well as other enrollment options in an online format. While we recognize that the pandemic has afforded the campus with many remote delivery options for GEs, we know that it will require a concerted effort on the part of the whole campus to determine which GE courses will be available to students in online degree programs.

Finally, committee members were struck by the absence of needs-based data to support UC Santa Cruz students' interest in fully online degree programs, as well as the opaque description of the marketing strategy the campus will undertake. While we recognize that such data might be hard to produce, we do not feel confident in making a campus-wide decision in the absence of data. Evidence-based decision-making is a hallmark of this campus, so we encourage additional analysis and data gathering regarding student demand for online degree programs.

Proposal

CEP members do support the development of a small-scale pilot program, such as the Creative Technologies proposal. In starting small, the campus would be afforded the opportunity to build an infrastructure to support online students *over time*. We think this approach would allow us to be cautious and innovative at the same time: We would have an opportunity to assess carefully students' experiences in an online program, their access to campus resources, and the quality of their educational experiences. From there, we may be able to develop a strategic vision for increasing access to online degree programs that would include the following:

1. A clear understanding of the exact nature of the support structures student would need to thrive (e.g., mental health access, disability services, tutoring, etc.);
2. A comprehensive strategy for assessing the efficacy of an online degree program at UC Santa Cruz;
3. More time for CEP to develop criteria for evaluating fully online degree program proposals; we anticipate that we could start this work by first evaluating a pilot program and then working backward to determine what we might require of fully online degree programs;
4. Additional opportunities to prepare the campus for increased online course offerings and assessments of those course offerings;
5. Concerted effort to determine which departments or programs would better serve students by offering online degree programs, in addition to determining how GEs will function in an online degree program context; and
6. An equity/access analysis to evaluate students' ability to succeed in an online program so we may troubleshoot any inequities that may emerge.

If we choose to proceed this way, CEP looks forward to developing initial criteria to assess the Creative Technologies proposal, and we strongly encourage that we build a cohesive plan for

assessing the value, impact, and wider implications of the pilot program, which would require local reporting potentially on a yearly basis.

To reiterate, CEP appreciates the opportunity to consult on this issue, and while we do not support the implementation of fully online degree programs at this time, we do believe that starting small will allow us to be strategic, careful, and intentional as we initiate online degree programs.

Sincerely,



Tanner WouldGo, *Pro Tem Chair*
Committee on Educational Policy

cc: Senate Executive Committee
David Smith, Chair, Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid
Dard Neuman, Chair, Committee on Planning and Budget
Catherine Jones, Chair, Committee on Teaching

November 15, 2021

David Brundage, Chair
Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

RE: VPAA's Final Report for Online Programs Initiative

Dear David,

The Committee on Teaching (COT) has reviewed the Final Report for Online Programs Initiative. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the report and share its implicit understanding that sustained, meaningful, and timely consultation will be essential to successfully develop any UC online degree program. The committee agrees that such programs are worthy of study and may prove valuable to some students if they are properly resourced and developed in ways that are consistent with the university's mission and governing principles. In the absence of a coherent overarching vision and sufficient funding, however, we also see potential pitfalls in their development. As the committee indicated in its April 7, 2021 comment on the Charter for Online Programs Initiative, we believe that it is vital that evidence and principles of equity guide the university's consideration of this possibility.

We encourage the university to investigate fully the potential challenges of supporting the instructional needs of new online degree programs while sustaining existing in-person ones. For example, online degrees often require accessory courses beyond those offered by faculty directly involved in a particular program, which can lead to pressure to shift more courses to online modalities in other programs. As CEP's November 4, 2021 letter notes, understanding how students in online degree programs will complete their general education requirements will be vital to assessing the impact of an online degree program on instruction in other parts of the university. Similarly, it will be important to explain whether/how students will be able to move between an online degree program and an in-person one, given that the decision would have repercussions beyond individual online degree programs. We encourage assessment of any proposed online programs to include an analysis of their potential impact on existing programs of study.

We are also concerned about the ability of the campus to resource online programs in a way that supports holistic, wraparound support for students and faculty participating in these programs. If the university pursues the development of online degree programs, we see a need for a clear, centralized vision of their place within the university's larger mission in order to develop sustainable programs that address the unique challenges of online degrees. Without such a vision, we are concerned that departments will be left to serially reinvent the wheel and that larger concerns that cut across departments like advising and academic integrity will be inadequately addressed.

UC Santa Cruz's commitment to promoting student success and inclusivity points to the importance of prioritizing equity in the assessment and implementation of any such program. Student success requires support at multiple levels including instruction, advising, and the cultivation of a sense of belonging. The materials provided in the final report left us with many questions: How will these forms of support be provided to students in online degree programs and

how will the university ensure that they are equitable with students pursuing in-person degrees? The data on UCSC's current retention and graduation rates suggest that additional forms of support may be needed for students in our existing programs. How will developing parallel forms of advising and support for new online degree programs affect the university's efforts to address those pressing needs for existing programs? We also seek clarification of the relationship of any new online degree program to university planning and reporting. For example, how will enrollments in online programs count in our long range development plan of 19,500? How will online degree programs be accounted for in university statistics? Developing answers to these questions seems particularly important given research that suggests lower graduation rates in online degree programs.

The report suggests that there is good potential in online degree programs aimed at degree completion. This seems like a particularly fruitful avenue to explore, as it would serve the university's larger objective of increasing graduation rates. Similarly, the report suggests that a master's degree program might offer a more contained approach to piloting this new endeavor. There appears to be a tension between the areas the report indicates hold the most promise for online formats and the one UCSC is poised to pursue. As CEP notes, the data on demand and marketing provided in the report is very limited. We appreciate the desire to make new online degree programs a faculty-driven initiative but also see the need for thoughtful consideration of the place of any online degree program within the university's larger mission. Should a pilot program be developed, we echo CEP's suggestion that the Senate engage in a careful review in order to assess outcomes and needs to guide future planning in this arena. COT would be interested in reviewing any data as it relates to pedagogical structure and impact.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this important proposal.

Sincerely,



Catherine Jones, Chair
Committee on Teaching

Encl. COT to ASC Brundage re Charter for Online Programs Initiative, 4-7-2021

cc: David Smith, Chair, Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid
Tanner WouldGo, *pro tem* Chair, Committee on Educational Policy
Dard Neuman, Chair, Committee on Planning and Budget
Senate Executive Committee

April 7, 2021

David Brundage, Chair
Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

RE: Charter for Online Programs Initiative

Dear David,

The Committee on Teaching (COT) discussed the Charter for Online Programs Initiative at our meeting on April 6. Committee members were grateful to the Task Force for the thoroughness of the report, for their flexibility in considering multiple perspectives, and for their recognition of the complexity of this endeavor. COT agrees with the report's overall assessment that a careful and inclusive review process is essential to avoiding unintended harmful consequences that the development of online degree programs could produce. COT noted additional concerns regarding this proposed initiative.

COT agreed that the questions the working group developed are reasonable and appropriate, and should be thoroughly investigated and addressed before initiating any online degree program. However, we are concerned that the aggressive timeline proposed in the report might make it difficult to gather such information in a thorough way. This seems particularly concerning in regard to assessing the real costs of developing the infrastructure necessary to ensure student and instructor success, while avoiding creating a two-tiered experience. We also think a thorough assessment of the costs is essential to ensuring that new online degree programs do not divert resources necessary to support student learning in existing programs. We hope that UCSC will benefit from the experience of other efforts to expand online education, including ILTI, whose expectations of increased revenue went unrealized. The report suggests that being among the first into this new endeavor is an important reason to move quickly; we think that it is more important to build programs that are in line with UCSC's values and that are likely to achieve the desired ends than to be among the first. We believe that consulting the Senate after answers to these key questions have been gathered would be essential. The Senate's insights will help campus leadership make an informed decision about whether to proceed. The current timeline seems to call for Senate feedback only after proposals have been submitted. Clarification is needed regarding how and when the Senate will provide further meaningful consultation once the questions have been answered and prior to making final decisions about whether to approve any online programs.

We appreciate the report's attention to questions of equity in how programs are developed. Nevertheless, COT shares CAAD's concern that it is not yet clear what consequences new online degree programs at UCSC would have for equity. Like CAAD, we worry that initiating online degree programs could have the unintended consequences of creating a two-tiered system and of harming equitable opportunities for students in the state. We think that further analysis is needed to investigate the potential consequences of this endeavor. We see a serious moral hazard in creating an online program to increase access for low income students if the result is low completion rates and high financial burdens (even though we understand that the housing savings might be significant), or a lower quality program and degree. Instructors in both face-to-face and online courses know that students' successful learning often depends on support they get beyond the

classroom, including effective advising and the range of resources currently captured under Slug Support on our campus. Without these kinds of support, it is difficult to imagine that our campus would succeed in achieving high completion rates. Additionally, the potentially large class sizes needed to make this model work financially seem inconsistent with our values as a university.

Lastly, COT has additional questions regarding the resources for sufficient instruction to ensure the quality of education. Currently, instructors in at least one division who teach fully online courses are not given the equivalent teaching credit as for in person instruction. Would this policy be changed? The report's messaging about fulfilling LRDP goals through online degrees is also of concern. Given UCSC's history of accepting additional students on campus without accompanying resources, the idea of increasing student enrollment with no constraints regarding housing or classroom size raises crucial questions about how resource implications will be handled. Increasing student enrollment without addressing the need for increasing faculty and staff to support this campus change is an inherently problematic way to plan for the future.

Our committee appreciates the opportunity to review this important initiative given the potential impact for UC Santa Cruz undergraduate education. We are skeptical about the need for fully online degrees at this time, and think that a more gradual approach makes more sense. Taking the next step of answering the identified questions is appropriate, but only with a much more extended timeline than what is proposed, and with meaningful senate consultation at every step.

Sincerely,



Maureen Callanan, Chair
Committee on Teaching

cc: Tracy Larrabee, Chair, Committee on Educational Policy
Yat Li, Chair, Committee on Courses of Instruction
Dard Neuman, Chair, Committee on Planning and Budget
Donald Smith, Chair, Graduate Council
Sylvanna Falcón, Chair, Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity
Leila Takayama, Chair, Committee on Information Technology
Minghui Hu, Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Nico Orlandi, Chair, Committee on Faculty Welfare
Julie Guthman, Chair, Committee on Privilege and Tenure

November 15, 2021

David Brundage, Chair
Academic Senate

RE: Online Programs Initiative Final Report

Dear David,

At its meeting of October 14, 2021, the Committee on Planning and Budget (CPB) reviewed the multiple reports produced by the charter group for the Online Programs Initiative. The committee understands the request to provide “Senate feedback on the decision to proceed with development and formal proposal of online degree programs” (VPAA to Senate Chair Brundage, 8/10/21). A shift to approving online programs--separate from the increasing number of online courses--has potentially transformative implications for the campus. Thus in this letter CPB memorializes this moment, sketches out a range of angles of vision on the issue, and establishes what’s at stake with different approaches to decision-making on online degree programs and the principles behind each approach.

Background

CPB appreciated the breadth and depth of the multiple reports. The subcommittees addressed a vast range of questions about the impact and requirements of online degree-programs. CPB also notes that this report comes a year after, and builds on, a system-wide review of a Senate report on undergraduate online degree-programs.¹ Consequently, many UC-wide and local campus issues were examined in the Online Programs Initiative reports: the mission and mandate to provide a UC quality education and the necessary cost involved to develop, mount and maintain such a curriculum; the question of enhanced access against the potential of creating a two-tiered system; the opportunity to apply innovative and best practice pedagogies to an entire curriculum against the danger of merely applying traditional practices to an online medium; the opportunity to be first in market (or early adopters) to establish brand recognition with high quality and innovative programs against the risk of failure and damage to the UCSC reputation. In other words, it is clear that the subcommittees kept the need for UC quality education in mind with their responses: an educational experience that involves many aspects beyond classroom instruction, including access to the expertise of faculty, to research facilities and research opportunities; a stimulating, diverse environment; conversations with peers from diverse backgrounds; the ability to take non-major classes, etc.

First Principle

CPB addressed the larger planning and budget implications of treating online degree-programs as a panacea for local problems that have long beset UC Santa Cruz (and look to get worse): available and affordable housing; lack of classroom space; impaction with in-demand majors; limited parking; and inadequate resources for staff and faculty FTE to keep pace with and serve the present and growing student population. CPB is also aware that online degree-programs, properly developed and supported, could mitigate these problems and even produce incremental revenue streams. *Still, CPB recommends against starting with the assumption that these programs be resource neutral.* Moreover, CPB recommends that the campus establish the UC research and teaching mission *as the first and paramount principle* to be upheld in creating these programs. This first principle can ensure that; 1) other important values and/or incentives don’t override the research and teaching mission; and 2) the proposals can provide more realistic cost estimates from which the campus can provide a more holistic assessment of potential tradeoffs when assessing proposals.

¹ See the Systemwide Report of the Online Undergraduate Degree Task Force (July 2020) and the UCSC Senate Response (12/18/2020).

CPB provides one example to illustrate the importance of establishing a first principle that tips the balance when different values come into conflict. In upholding equitable access as a central value, the Student Experience subcommittee reasoned that near-universal access could only be achieved if the technological requirements for online students be held to a minimum. CPB fully supports the principle of equitable access, but nevertheless came to a very different conclusion: keeping technological requirements to a minimum might very well compromise a UC quality education. Conversely, in order to maintain such standards with regard to its mission, the campus should make the equipment required to experience an R1 education available to all students in need. CPB's stance emerged because it began with the presumption that the first principle for any new program is that it be "UC-quality" as opposed to, say, equitable access or revenue neutrality. Without such a first principle the campus runs the risk of undercutting its most fundamental mission.

Thus, if the campus is to properly invest in making an online-degree program UC quality and then accessible, the potential costs of providing access to all admitted students-in-need should be built into all proposals. The campus would then be in a better position to conduct a more realistic, rigorous and principled cost-benefit analysis that includes the potential tradeoffs in making such an investment. The question of tradeoffs is critically important given the impact of reduced state support (measured in per student funding) over the last fifteen years on the ability of existing programs to mount and maintain a UC quality curriculum. As is well known, many programs on campus have been under-resourced for years and are in urgent need to hire more faculty and staff, to provide more classroom space, to provide adequate maintenance on research and teaching facilities, and to better support its undergraduate and graduate students, among other critical needs. In such persistent conditions of fiscal austerity and infrastructural degradation, can UCSC afford to dedicate the resources necessary to develop and deliver a UC quality online-degree program while also stabilizing and strengthening (and in some cases growing), its existing programs? The answer might very well be "yes" (and further, the answer might be "can UCSC afford not to invest in online degree-programs?"), but the question of tradeoffs was not addressed in the reports because they presupposed the requirement of revenue-neutrality. In either case, *CPB cautions against an incentive structure that rewards the development of online degree-programs at the expense of stabilizing and strengthening existing programs.*

Moreover (as will be discussed below), it is not always clear that other UC programs developed to be revenue generating or revenue neutral (such as university extension or self-supporting graduate professional degree programs) actually achieve revenue neutrality, let alone benefit the campus as a whole. Worse, some programs appear to require additional resources and damage the UC reputation.

Benefits and Opportunities

CPB appreciates that online degree-programs may represent another way of manifesting the cutting edge research that a top R1 institution is dedicated to producing. Indeed, the Creative Technologies proposal referred to in the documents appears ideally suited to an online modality because the language and method of instruction is also the subject of study. In this context, such programs can transcend concerns about loss of community experience because they are designed explicitly to develop and engage through digital communities. Put differently, Creative Technologies provides a potential model whereby an online program can be indigenous to the digital medium, setting an example for programs that are not just equivalent to traditional UC programs, but set their own terms with a very high bar to entry for a UC quality digital education. CPB therefore eagerly anticipates reading the proposal for this program-in-waiting, with a curriculum and experience that is forward looking, and the outcome of innovative faculty research and efforts. In turn, this high bar reinforces the point that research innovation and excellence in teaching go hand in hand. Though cost will always be a consideration, looking at online programs as a whole in this way makes it possible to see their very real benefits to the campus if the campus heeds its first principle.

CPB recommends that our campus work to develop equivalent rigorous standards for UC quality education for already-existing programs that convert to online. The marketing subcommittee report details the most “popular majors” and identifies on that basis several existing programs at UCSC as “good candidates for online degree program offerings that could also increase capacity and access” (p. 7). However, it is not clear if those programs have been or can be assessed according to the UC quality standard.

Watchouts/Lookouts

CPB noted that online-only degree programs might require new approaches to campus- and system-wide review. For example, it might be necessary to have reviews not just to approve a course or a program, but to have regular reviews after a course has been taught: this would provide a check against online courses evolving to “teach themselves”, a concern shared by CPB members. On the flip side, CPB members were also concerned about the line between academic freedom and curricular and pedagogical integrity. Given the newness of the online medium for teaching and innovations in pedagogy that have emerged as a result, faculty might not be able to teach “as they are used to teaching” in the physical environment. As a new program having broad implications across the university, we expect that CAF and CEP will provide feedback and guidance on maintaining academic freedom and setting standards for online pedagogic expectations, and to avoid stagnation and maintain quality faculty/student interaction and feedback loops. We would also expect that CAP will provide clear guidelines for course evaluations and recognition for course and program development.

CPB also recommends that UCSC learn from what has worked/not worked with self-supporting graduate programs at other UC campuses. As discussed by a 2019-2020 Joint Working Group of CCGA and UCPB on Self-Supporting Graduate Professional Degree Programs (SSGPDPs), many programs were established without clear assessment plans and lacked transparent financial reporting structures.² Consequently, it has been difficult to determine if revenue neutrality was achieved, if invisible labor has been required, if state resources have been cannibalized, and if educational quality has been compromised. Regardless of whether revenue neutrality remains a foundational requirement or not, *CPB recommends that a clear assessment plan be built into any approved program.* Moreover, the burden and responsibility of developing an assessment plan and implementing it should not be borne by the department and its home division alone: indeed, to guarantee neutrality in assessment as well as to have the financial tools to provide the required data and the transparent visibility to assess it, both the plan and the tools of implementation should reside in the center and with the Senate.

Conclusion

CPB appreciates the opportunity to review these reports and to opine on this very important topic.

Sincerely,



Dard Neuman, Chair
Committee on Planning and Budget

cc: CAFA Chair Smith
CEP Chair *Pro-Tem* WouldGo
COT Chair Jones

² <https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/committees/ccga/2021-ccga-ucpb-workgroup-report-on-ssgpsps.pdf>