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Subject: UCAD Plus Joint Task Force Update #3

Dear Colleagues,

We are reaching out to share our third update on the work of the [UCAD Plus Joint Task Force](#). Since our last communication, our workgroups have coalesced around short- and long-term recommendations that support the core mission of this task force, which is to identify strategies and actions that will improve coordination and build resilience across the UC system. Each of these groups has diligently identified creative ways to leverage existing strengths and external partnerships to improve efficiency and preserve and expand capacity amid ongoing disruptions.

You can learn more by reading through the summaries provided below by the co-chairs of each UCAD Plus workgroup.

WG1 – Research Activities & Infrastructure

WG1 has begun drafting our report. Though these are still preliminary, our recommendations fall into three categories. The first involves developing strategies for gap funding. We recognize that there is no replacement for federal funding given its magnitude, and no solutions that will apply uniformly to all research projects or disciplines. But there are a number of actions that can be undertaken that could stabilize research programs that have lost funding, such as reframing existing research to better align with emerging federal priorities; working with foundations and donors to target research areas that cannot be reframed or are otherwise impacted; and building international partnerships and participating in international research funding opportunities.

The second category looks at how to build resilience into our research infrastructure. We are considering how to better incentivize building shared research infrastructure, including for cross-campus collaboration; how to maximize the efficient use of existing infrastructure; and targeted investments aimed at preserving data and other resources that are currently at risk due to federal policies, but which will be necessary for future research on key topics such as climate change. We also point out existing examples of shared infrastructure that seem to be highly successful and consider these models to be worthy of further study and replication. Finally, we are considering recommendations involving additional campus-based planning for research disruptions due to exogenous shocks and natural disasters, as preliminary work suggests that research continuity planning should be more robust.

WG2 – Academic Personnel Evaluations

The working group is in the process of finalizing and stress testing its recommendations. It is landing on recommendations including a set of principles for the implementation of Achievement Relative to Opportunity (ARO) principles that balances providing flexibility and opportunity for disrupted faculty while maintaining UC's long-standing standards for quality and excellence embodied in our promotion and advancement policies.

Our preliminary set of recommendations are in the following categories: (1) Clarifying the application of ARO; (2) Contextual evaluation of faculty performance and workload; (3) Flexibility in research and scholarship evaluation to include new models of research and funding; (4) Flexibility in career pathways within existing faculty series; and (5) Flexibility in teaching and mentoring evaluations to include models such as cross-department and cross-campus teaching.

WG3 – Program Evaluation and Alignment

We have structured our discussions around the seven fundamental questions that the group identified earlier and have developed a total of about 25-30 recommendations. One theme that runs through them is strengthening the connections between individual campuses, so that UC can more fully leverage the power of the entire system.

The recommendations begin with ideas for strengthening ties between similar departments across the system, including regular meetings among department chairs, systemwide workshops among similar departments, and intercampus courtesy appointments. These activities can help develop synergies between departments at different campuses, facilitate sharing of resources, and possibly promote shared offering of courses.

We also offer specific recommendations on how courses could be shared across the system, including on-line synchronous classes as well as sharing in-person classes using, e.g., intensive summer schools and "semester away" options for students from one campus to spend a semester at another campus. We expect such flexibility may help smaller programs maintain viability by partnering with similar programs across the system. It may also help larger programs offer more specialized or targeted training to students gathered from across the system.

In a similar spirit, we recommend greater sharing of laboratory and instrumentation resources across the system (note overlap with WG1). We also make recommendations on the utilization of teaching versus research focused faculty. Several recommendations focus on the function of program reviews and how to place such reviews in the broader context of the department, school, campus, and national discipline. Finally, we end with recommended changes to some University policies and procedures.

WG4 – Instructional Opportunities

Workgroup's report focuses on making recommendations in four general areas

1. Adopt a culture of shared departmental responsibility for instruction. This includes moving from informal to formal backup plans for individual courses and understanding which course materials are suited for shared development.
2. In moving from an individual culture of instructional responsibility where it is “one instructor, one course” to a shared culture of responsibility, adjust the merit and promotion process to account for this shift.
3. Adopt instructional team models that are both pedagogically effective and flexible enough to be responsive to disruption.
4. Conduct systematic data collection on disruptions and online tool usage for better planning. This is one of the potential roles we identified for UC Online. In addition, UC Online can play a role in programs that build on cross-campus enrollment and identifying impacts of the regulatory system on our ability to respond to disruptions.

We close the report with a section that highlights specific recommendations drawn from the discussion for various levels within the UC structure. We consider UC Office of the President (UCOP), the systemwide Academic Senate, campus administrative structures (including the department level), and divisional Academic Senates. A key point is that communication between these different levels is essential to effective handling of disruptions.

WG5 – Future of Graduate Education

The overarching goal of this working group is to improve student outcomes, ensure program sustainability, and maintain academic quality in the face of significant and increasing resource constraints, while acknowledging and respecting disciplinary and campus variability.

After consulting with Academic Senate Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) and the Council of Graduate Deans (COGD) and surveying campus practices, the workgroup is developing specific implementation suggestions in four key recommendations:

1. Support innovation and experimentation
 - Create a competitive systemwide pilot funding program (innovation seed grants) for individual campuses and multi-campus collaborations
 - Prioritize pilots targeting shared curricular resources, advising structures, degree completion support, and program review redesign
2. Improve time-to-degree outcomes
 - Require programs to monitor student progress against discipline-appropriate benchmarks and address concerns when normative timelines are approached or exceeded
 - Develop stigma-free off-ramps for more graduate students, including those not making timely progress toward degree completion, and alternatives to doctoral student status (postdocs, lectureships, research staff) for long-tenured students
3. Ensure program quality and sustainability
 - Strengthen existing program reviews to explicitly evaluate time-to-degree, completion rates, placement outcomes (beyond academic placements), and program size sustainability

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- Where programs persistently fail benchmarks, consider targeted improvement plans, restructuring, or discontinuation
- 4. Align faculty incentives with evolving doctoral program structures
 - Clarify expectations for teaching and advising loads and ensure faculty advancement pathways remain viable as program sizes change
 - Ask University Committee on Academic Personnel (UCAP) and campus academic personnel administrators to review how doctoral supervision and mentoring are weighted in faculty evaluations

Next Steps

We have more work to do and will report on next steps in a month. The UCAD Plus Joint Task Force and the Administrative Transformation Initiative, convened by COO Rachael Nava and CFO Nathan Brostrom, will meet jointly on April 3 to discuss shared recommendations and areas of future collaboration. The groups will meet again in-person at UC Irvine in early May. Following these meetings, the UCAD Plus workgroups will refine and finalize their recommendations for submission to the UCAD Plus Steering Committee in early June.

We look forward to staying in touch as these essential conversations continue.

Cordially,

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