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*Chair of the Assembly and the Academic Council
Faculty Representative to the Board of Regents
University of California
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, California 94607-5200*

April 14, 2009

**PRESIDENT MARK YUDOF
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

Re: Shared Research Computing Pilot Project

Dear Mark:

At its meeting on March 25, the Academic Council unanimously endorsed the enclosed recommendations of the University Committee on Computing and Communications (UCCC) for modification of IR&C's shared research computing project. While the goals of the project are laudable, UCCC and the Academic Council do not believe that the cost of the project justifies the expense, particularly at a time of budget crisis when all available funds should be directed toward alleviating campus budget shortfalls. For example, this money could be applied to implementing minimum connectivity standards for all UC faculty and staff. Further, the project benefits a very small group of PIs who would otherwise have their expenses covered through research grants. I recognize that David Ernst came to meet with Senate leadership early on, as well as to the Committee on Research Policy (UCORP) and UCCC. However, the lack of Senate consultation in recruiting or identifying projects for the proposed pilot study is troubling. Finally, the criteria for evaluating the benefits of the project are unclear. Given your objective to use one-time investments to establish long-term savings for the University, it would be particularly helpful if we received a summary of the estimated cost savings and benefits associated with this pilot project.

Council endorses UCCC's recommendation that the project be cancelled and the funds be redirected to each of the campuses. If the project goes forward, the Academic Council has called for significant modifications in the process, including: 1) the principals should submit a plan for a revised SRCPP that provides stronger support for Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities; (2) the SRCPP team should issue another RFP with the opportunity widely advertised to faculty on all campuses, and the selection of pilot applications should be made by a systemwide committee with knowledgeable faculty strongly represented; (3) IR&C should work with UCCC, UCORP, and other Senate committees to establish clear metrics for how SRCPP will save money and what new funding sources it will develop; and (4) campuses should choose their own representative on the SRCPP advisory body through a transparent selection process. I have attached UCCC's letter for your information. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding Council's requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Croughan". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Mary Croughan, Chair
Academic Council

Copy: Academic Council
Martha Winnacker, Senate Director
David Ernst, Associate Vice President, IR&C
Katherine Lapp, Executive Vice President, Business Operations

Encl (1)



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON COMPUTING AND COMMUNICATIONS (UCCC)
Lisa Naugle, Chair
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March 31, 2009

**MARY CROUGHAN, CHAIR
ACADEMIC SENATE**

RE: SHARED RESEARCH COMPUTING PILOT PROJECT

Dear Chair Croughan,

On March 25, 2009, the University Committee on Computing and Communication (UCCC) addressed the Academic Senate to elaborate on our letter of March 3, 2009 concerning the Shared Research Computing Pilot Project. The committee was represented by Chair Lisa Naugle who put forth concerns on behalf of the committee. The Academic Senate requested that UCCC provide a second letter elaborating on the main points that were brought before the Senate. What follows is the requested information in support of UCCC's position.

On February 27, 2009 UCCC engaged in a telephone conference call with David Ernst, Associate Vice President and CIO, Information Resources & Communications, to discuss his proposal for the Shared Research Computing Pilot Project (SRCPP).

Based on the materials provided by AVP Ernst, UCCC agrees that the stated goals of the project are laudable, for example keeping UC infrastructure competitive with peer institutions, improving energy and cost efficiencies while increasing the quality of service, and expanding service to a broader base of PIs. The project's stated goal of nucleating "new communities of cyber-enabled research in areas like the social sciences, arts, and humanities" is attractive to UCCC (referring to the document "Why A UC Shared Research Cyber-infrastructure Pilot" Council of Chancellors—9-3-08.). Also laudable is the rhetoric presented in various "talking points" and planning documents regarding the transparency of the project's governance and faculty involvement in managing it.

UCCC wants to be clear that our concerns in no way reflect the merit or worth of the research proposals put forth by the SRCPP Principal Investigators. However, UCCC believes that the project as currently structured has limited benefit in that it reaches only a small number of researchers. UCCC notes that the selected projects in the area of astrophysics are by researchers who already have great access to powerful national supercomputing facilities. David Schlegel, for example, is at the National Energy Research Scientific Computing Center operated by the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, which has far more computer power than the proposed shared research-computing center. Considering the severe cutbacks the University is facing, this funding could be better used elsewhere. For example, it could be applied to implementing minimum connectivity standards for all UC faculty and staff.

This “shared” research computing pilot project seems to have gone too far without sufficient input from faculty and campuses. Since multiple campuses are involved and we are talking about shared computing research, UCCC is concerned that this project has not undergone an appropriate consultation process. Consultation with appropriate Academic Senate committees was not pursued in a timely manner, which has left UCCC with many unanswered questions and with insufficient time available to have those questions answered. For example, will the proposed UC-wide advisory group yet to be established to govern the project and its evaluation be selected in a fair and representative process? Will there be representation from appropriate Academic Senate committees? It is apparent that the pilot got off on the wrong foot in the proposal stage. The call for faculty participation and input was not sufficiently broad, and we are particularly troubled that the process for identifying potential projects appears to have been based primarily on VCR nomination. From this fact alone, the public could draw the (entirely incorrect) conclusion that the project is an insider boondoggle, not a perception that UC can afford at any time, and especially not now.

Setting aside issues of shared governance, UCCC has also not been able to achieve clarity on the metrics for evaluating the energy, cost, and service related efficiencies that are claimed in the pilot proposal. It seems important to have, at minimum, a more technical draft of the evaluation criteria than is currently available. The UCSD and NERSC facilities provide space, but UC will need to purchase equipment and hire operating staff. Has it been considered that Amazon EC2 can be expanded to add more UC users without giving UC the burden of dealing with old equipment, backup and operational staff issues?

Further, the number of projects served in the pilot seems small to us, and thus it is unclear if the 24 projects will serve as a sufficient stress test to evaluate the efficiencies claimed.

UCCC believes that before the UC commits to this \$5.6 million expenditure, more concrete answers should be provided to the above questions.

UCCC recommends the following in order of preference:

- 1) The project is cancelled and the money be redirected to each of the campuses.
- 2) The principals submit a plan for a revised SRCPP that has stronger support for Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities. Researchers in these areas may benefit from access to a project of this scale but these uses are not reflected in the current pilot.
- 3) The SRCPP team should issue another RFP with the opportunity widely advertised to faculty on all campuses, and the selection of pilot applications should be done by a systemwide committee with knowledgeable faculty strongly represented.
- 4) IR&C should work with UCCC and other committees to establish clear metrics for how SRCPP will save money and what new funding sources it will develop.
- 5) Campuses must choose their own representative on the SRCPP advisory body. The process for selection of the representative should be transparent.

Sincerely,



Lisa Naugle, Chair
UCCC

Cc: UCCC members

Martha Winnacker, Executive Director, Systemwide Academic Senate