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**YVETTE GULLATT, VICE PRESIDENT & VICE PROVOST  
GRADUATE, UNDERGRADUATE AND EQUITY AFFAIRS**

**Re: Report of the UC Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities**

Dear Yvette,

As requested, I distributed for systemwide Academic Senate review the report of the UC Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities. All ten Senate divisions and three systemwide committees (UCAADE, UCFW, and CCGA) submitted comments. These comments were discussed at the Academic Council's May 22 meeting and are compiled for your reference in [this link](#).

The report examines the experiences and needs of students with disabilities and makes recommendations for policies, programs, services, and campus culture improvements. In addition to reviewing the overall report, we asked faculty to respond to your request for specific input on recommendations in the report affecting faculty, including:

1. Making courses inclusive during design or redesign rather than midcourse or later.
2. Designating and supporting faculty liaisons to improve communication between faculty, disabled student services, and teaching and learning centers.
3. Reviewing Academic Senate regulations for "Incomplete" grades and academic progress policies to ensure they do not disproportionately impact students with disabilities.

**General Comments**

Faculty are committed to supporting the academic success of students with disabilities and their greater inclusion and belonging on UC campuses, and we believe the report provides a strong foundation for broader faculty discussions of better support mechanisms. The report is helpful in identifying current campus disability provisions and areas needing improvement, highlighting the need to reframe disability as an issue of inclusion, as well as emphasizing the faculty's role in destigmatizing disabilities and fostering equitable access to educational opportunities. The attached comments show that the report has already inspired individual campuses to consider ways to be more equitable.

In general, the Senate supports the recommendations to recruit more disability specialists, make courses inclusive from the design phase, and designate more faculty liaisons to improve communication. Additionally, the Senate endorses addressing physical barriers in campus spaces, integrating accessible mapping and signage, and prioritizing universal, disability-friendly design in campus planning. However, faculty also identified several barriers to full accessibility and raised concerns about specific aspects of the recommendations involving faculty.

### **Inadequate Resources**

Prominent in the reviews were concerns about the inadequacy of physical infrastructure, staffing, and other resources needed to fully implement the recommendations. Senate divisions confirm that disability offices on many campuses are overburdened, making it more difficult for students and faculty to access services promptly. The Senate support efforts to improve the ratio of disability office staff to students, increase resources for disabled student services, process accommodation requests, help faculty improve course accessibility, and address disparities in graduation rates between students with and without disabilities. Given existing budget constraints, Senate divisions recommend an approach that uses existing resources and administrative structures to remedy deficiencies rather than developing expensive new senior management positions throughout the administration.

### **Faculty Training and Support**

Disabled Students Program faculty liaisons play an important role in helping faculty design and coordinate accommodations, and we support the recommendation to designate more liaisons, and also suggest creating a liaison network to better support and implement accommodations. However, reviewers noted that many faculty lack awareness about disability services or the necessary information to support and implement accommodations. This highlights the need for better faculty education and training on how to better navigate and advocate for disabled students' needs. We support more directed guidance and assistance for both students and faculty around testing and reasonable accommodations, as well as more robust investments in infrastructure and pedagogical support to create universally accessible learning environments.

### **Concerns About Faculty Labor and Academic Freedom**

There are significant concerns about the faculty labor required to fully implement the recommendations. Moreover, many faculty oppose recording their lectures for various reasons and do not support its use as an accommodation without proper pedagogical justification. Mandates for faculty to redesign syllabi, have disability advisors mediate student requests, and change standards for "Incomplete" grades can represent an undue burden on faculty and infringe on their academic freedom to design courses and evaluate coursework. We support evidence-based criteria in determining accommodations for disabled students and upholding academic standards for accommodations. We suggest a joint systemwide Senate-Administration workgroup to develop guidelines and best practices to advise faculty on how to design their courses for optimal accessibility.

### **Graduate Students and Education Abroad**

Several reviewers encouraged additional focus on graduate students with disabilities and their particular needs as students, teaching assistants, and graduate research assistants, highlighting the lack of discussion on these needs in the report. Another population left out of the report was students with disabilities who wish to take advantage of education abroad opportunities.

## Review of Senate Regulations

The report recommends a review of Senate regulations to ensure that the local application of “Incomplete” (“I”) grades and academic standing/progress policies do not have a disparate impact on undergraduate, graduate, and professional students with disabilities. [Regulation 778](#) delegates authority to individual Senate divisions for specific grading policies and procedures, including “I” grades. Campus Senate policies prioritize fairness and consistency in handling “I” grades and may include provisions for students to request extensions or appeal “I” grades. Individual campuses report that their “I” grade policies are working well for students and instructors. The UCLA Senate recently adjusted its policy to make it more inclusive as proposed by student leaders. The systemwide Senate encourages Senate divisions to periodically review policies around “I” grades and assessments of student standing to ensure they are implemented equitably for students with disabilities and align with other student needs and institutional goals. Collaboration among faculty, administrators, and students can help shape inclusive and effective policies.

## Conclusion

The Senate supports a multifaceted approach to improving support for students with disabilities, focused on providing adequate infrastructure, resources, staffing, and training; addressing the specific needs of graduate students; and evaluating accommodations policies to ensure they are clear, appropriately flexible, and prevent unintended impacts on students with disabilities.

Such an approach is important, given that faculty have observed an increasing number of students with documented disabilities and more complex accommodation requests over the past several years. Unfortunately, this trend has coincided with a declining ratio of disabled student specialists to support them. It would have been informative for the report to discuss the factors behind these increases, the conditions or situations qualifying for disability accommodations, and how different campuses assess students for accommodations.

Finally, Senate reviewers noted the near absence of faculty representation on the workgroup that wrote the report. A greater faculty presence and perspective would have been helpful in its discussion of course accessibility and pedagogical practices, as well as the resources and challenges associated with alterations of course content delivery and assessment methods. As you continue this important work, we ask that you include the Academic Senate.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to share our perspectives as we work together toward a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,



James Steintrager, Chair  
Academic Council

Cc: Academic Council  
Provost & Executive Vice President Newman  
Chief Policy Advisor Peterson  
Senate Division Executive Directors  
Senate Executive Director Lin