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July 7, 2021

**MICHAEL T. BROWN**
**PROVOST AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**
**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

**Re: Master's Program Reviews**

Dear Michael,

At its June 2021 meeting, the Academic Council unanimously endorsed the attached letter from the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) and the University Committee on Planning and Budget (UCPB). This letter expresses serious concerns about your proposal to move the delegated approval authority for state- and self-supporting master's programs from UCOP and the systemwide Senate to the campus chancellors and division Senates.

You discussed the proposal at the May Academic Council meeting and the June Assembly meeting. We appreciate that you also took the time to meet with CCGA and UCPB to discuss it. Your main concern, as we understand it, is that the systemwide review adds unnecessary time to the Master's program review process. You have also questioned whether the systemwide review adds significant value to the process, which you believe is more appropriately situated on the campuses. Additionally, you emphasized that your proposal is at an early stage, and that you want to work with the systemwide Senate and campus Senates to identify opportunities for strengthening and streamlining the review process.

The Council considered the proposal seriously and, in the end, decided to reject it. The Council believes, without reservation, that the review of academic master's and self-supporting graduate professional degree programs (SSGPDPs) should continue to reside with the systemwide Senate. The systemwide Senate evaluation provides a valuable and objective multi-campus perspective about proposed academic programs. This perspective has demonstrable benefits for academic quality, equity across campuses, and in the case of SSGPDPs, financial soundness. These evaluations help protect the welfare of graduate students, faculty who teach in the programs, and campuses.

The central role of the Senate in the review of master's programs is clearly outlined in the Compendium, a long-honored set of agreements between the Administration and Senate. We consider the Compendium to be one of the most important guiding documents for shared

governance at the University, in addition to Regents Bylaw 40, which outlines the Senate's delegated authority over academic programs.

We acknowledge your sincere interest in the establishment of master's degree programs at the University. However, we are unsure what aspects of the review process you find problematic and that your proposal aims to solve. A recent claim that the systemwide review adds a year to the process is not supported by data. Currently, CCGA reviews programs that are submitted on-time in about three months on average. The average review time for SSGPDPs is a little, but not substantially, longer. Thus, the process is already quite efficient. In fact, it is more than reasonable for programs we expect to last for decades. We also note that the average review time has improved significantly compared to five years ago when it was nearly six months. It is also important to note that eliminating the CCGA review would not appreciably diminish the time that campus Graduate Councils would need to solicit internal and external reviews and then work with proposers on changes and improvements that may be required for approval.

We are also concerned with the objectivity of the review process. The systemwide Senate evaluation, which is conducted by representatives from across the University, is objective and, thereby, avoids the practice or appearance of a conflict of interest. In contrast, we see a strong possibility for conflicts of interest in campus-based reviews. This concern is paramount for SSGPDPs given the strong financial pressures on the internal campus review to approve these programs because they are perceived to be important revenue generators.

Notwithstanding these concerns, we accept your invitation to work together to assess the current system. We endorse the committees' proposal to form a joint work group charged with evaluating the overall master's program review process. To be clear, the work group should not be tasked with implementing your proposal to delegate reviews to campuses, but with a more general assessment of practices and concerns and, importantly, informed by transparent and accurate data. We recommend the CCGA chair co-chair the work group, and we suggest it begin its review in September and finish no later than the end of calendar year 2021.

We look forward to working with you on this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

Mary Gauvain, Chair
Academic Council

Cc:     President Drake
        Chief of Staff Kao
        Chief of Staff Peterson
        CCGA
        UCPB
        Academic Council
        Senate Directors
        Systemwide Senate Director Baxter

Encl.

COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE AFFAIRS (CCGA)
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June 16, 2021

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL CHAIR MARY GAUVAIN**
**ACADEMIC COUNCIL VICE CHAIR ROBERT HORWITZ**

Dear Chair Gauvain and Vice Chair Horwitz,

On behalf of CCGA and UCPB we are writing this memo to reflect some of our thoughts on Provost Brown's recent proposal to delegate presidential approval of new Master Degree proposals to the Divisional Chancellors. This proposal represents a radical change from the current systemwide approval process. Graduate degrees in general, and Master's degrees in particular, are among the most sought after and most visible aspects of the University of California's graduate education mission. We are all committed to maintaining the high caliber of our graduate degrees, as they reflect critically on the fame and reputation of the University of California (the UC Brand). We strongly believe that any changes need to be clearly motivated, well studied, and all ramifications clearly understood. Such changes are clearly desirable when they improve not only the current system with respect to reputation and thoroughness but also efficiency and effectiveness. Master's programs, in particular, are quite diverse in their academic goals, structures and finances. We should always be open to evaluating and critiquing the current process and exploring ways to improve it with the ultimate goal of maintaining the highest academic standards while ensuring that the process is efficient and effective.

To start, we feel we need to briefly explain the current process. At the moment, the University of California offers various general types of Master's degrees: Academic Master's, Professional Master's (PDST), Self-Supporting Graduate Professional Degree Program Master's (SSGPDP) and five-year BS/MS Programs. Although they differ in their goals and target students, they more or less follow the same review process, with some exceptions, especially for SSGPDPs. Master Program proposals are developed and initiated at the individual campuses, where they are evaluated and approved by the local Graduate Councils and approved by the Divisional Senates. Then they are forwarded to the Provost and CCGA. CCGA is composed of a diverse committee with representatives from all 10 UC campuses as well as UCOP consultants from Research and Academic Planning as well as Graduate Studies. CCGA conducts an in-depth academic evaluation by assigning each proposal to a lead reviewer. The lead reviewer is responsible for analyzing the proposal and soliciting outside letters from experts. Typically, two UC and two non-UC experts in the field are consulted. The lead reviewer interacts with the program proposer to address any issues raised by the external experts as well as any concerns that arise during CCGA discussions of the proposal. This often results in changes in the proposal that improve both its academic structure as well as solidifying its financial underpinning. Critical in this evaluation is an analysis of the diversity goals and plans of the proposal, its vision for diversity, as well as strategies for evaluating the success of such plans. SSGPDP

proposals go through an extra round of reviewing by UCPB. This review is critical to ensure the financial soundness of the SSGPDP proposal as well as to ensure that it does not infringe on state-supported degrees. In some rare cases, CCGA and UCPB have identified and rectified contractual details with third parties. Once CCGA approves a proposal, it is forwarded to the Provost via the Senate for final Presidential approval and, in case of Professional degrees, to the Regents for final approval.

As you can see, the systemwide process has an in-depth academic as well as financial evaluation. If a submitted proposal has no major issues, from our experience, it typically takes one or two months. However, often campus delays occur as proposers explore ways to improve their proposal in response to the expert suggestions as well as attempting to garner more resources to ensure the viability and financial success of the process. These changes to the proposal strengthen its academic integrity as well as its financial viability. Although one can imagine that many of these reviews could be conducted locally at the divisional level, we feel that a more distanced systemwide review provides, in general, a more thorough, standardized and objective evaluation. In particular,

- CCGA review and the presidential approval process adds much needed standardization and value to the **quality** of the proposed programs. Many campuses have come to rely on this centralization as a check on campus excesses and strong-arming. Divisional Councils have inherent conflicts of interest and are more prone to internal pressure. Systemwide review, as conducted by CCGA, does not suffer from such challenges, while providing diverse representation from all campuses as well as historical context for consultation and diversity of views. Furthermore, systemwide standardization of quality control ensures **equity** across campuses. CCGA has recently provided much guidance to ensure **Diversity** issues are clearly articulated, including a vision, a process as well as an evaluation methodology. CCGA maintains critical oversight to ensure such diversity goals are pursued and implemented. Furthermore, note that Master's programs serve the largest chunk of graduate students, hence the rigors of a standardized centralized review process ensure that we preserve the high quality and uniformity of the Graduate Education UC brand.

- UCPB provides much needed **external oversight** over the finances of SSGPDPs. Master's programs are often seen as a potential revenue generator at the campus level and there can be considerable local pressure to approve them for resource reasons. But while a well-run Master's program can be a net financial benefit to a campus, systemwide financial review plays a critical role to ensure that self-supporting programs do not infringe on state-supported resources, revenue from self-supporting programs are directed to the overall welfare of the campuses and students, and that programs are using realistic and sustainable budget modeling.

Needless to say, there may be advantages to delegating more of the responsibilities to the local campuses. Such delegation will, however, require more local scrutiny, more in-depth evaluations, including the solicitation of external expert letters, neutral third-party financial oversight, and other functions that may be difficult to provide in the local context. Will this result in a more streamlined process than the current system? Will this ensure more equitable processes that maintain the high quality of review, far from pressure and self-interest? In some cases, such delegation might be straightforward, e.g., BS/MS and "Simple Name Change" proposals could easily be delegated to the campuses. However, SSGPDPs and academic Master's are much more complex for the reasons noted above. To answer these questions, we feel that a **working group** should be formed that studies and explores these issues. The group should not simply be tasked with exploring the Provost's current proposal for delegation of authority to campuses but rather should have the more open-ended charge of evaluating our current system and considering the full range of possible options should the group find that improvement is needed. Our vision for the composition of this group should be broad

representing the various stakeholders involved in this complex process:  Senate, administration as well as campus representation.

Respectfully,

Amr El Abbadi, Chair
CCGA

Sean Malloy, Chair
UCPB


cc:  CCGA Members
    UCPB Members
    Hilary Baxter, Academic Senate Executive Director
    Michael LaBriola, Academic Senate Assistant Director