



*Robert Horwitz*  
*Telephone: (510) 987-0887*  
*Email: robert.horwitz@ucop.edu*

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

December 21, 2021

## **SENATE DIVISION CHAIRS**

### **Re: Recommendations to Senate Divisions about Responding to Remote Teaching Requests from TAs and GSIs**

Dear Colleagues:

At its December 2021 meeting, the Academic Council endorsed the attached letter from the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA). The letter includes recommendations for responding to requests from Teaching Assistants and Graduate Student Instructors to move courses to a remote format for non-pedagogical reasons unrelated to medical accommodation, such as a lack of affordable housing near campus, convenience, or personal preference. We ask that you forward the letter and recommendations to your local undergraduate and graduate councils for discussion and follow-up.

In its letter, CCGA expresses concern that there are widely dissimilar practices for responding to requests within individual UC campuses and across campuses, which could lead to uneven application and create inequities, especially if requests increase after the pandemic. Council joins CCGA in affirming that UC is primarily a residential university and in recommending that campus Senates establish pedagogy as the overriding consideration on which to base decisions about converting a course to a remote instructional modality. Remote instruction should not be a solution to a problem that has nothing to do with curriculum. Council also asks campus Senates to establish clear policies and procedures for responding to remote teaching accommodation requests that prevent disparities across departments.

Council acknowledges that graduate students are disproportionately affected by the affordable housing shortage and have fewer resources to support their housing costs compared to other types of instructors. We see TAs and GSIs as crucial to the University's ability to meet a broad range of educational goals, and we strongly support new institutional efforts to support their housing and financial needs.

Finally, Council understands that requests for non-medical teaching accommodation are not limited to TAs and GSIs, and it is not Council's intention to single them out. The principles and recommendations should apply to all instructors.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Horwitz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

Robert Horwitz, Chair  
Academic Council

Cc: Campus Senate Directors  
Executive Director Baxter

Encl.



**COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE AFFAIRS (CCGA)**

Andrea M. Kasko, Chair  
[akasko@g.ucla.edu](mailto:akasko@g.ucla.edu)

**ACADEMIC SENATE**

University of California  
1111 Franklin Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Oakland, California 94607-5200

December 9, 2021

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL CHAIR ROBERT HORWITZ**

Dear Chair Horwitz,

As we have discussed since October, CCGA is concerned about the desire of some Teaching Assistants/Graduate Student Instructors to teach remotely for reasons other than pedagogy or medical accommodation. Reasons may include difficulty in finding affordable housing within a reasonable commuting distance (which may be exacerbated by issues such as wildfires), the lack of a need to access campus physically for any reason other than the TA/GSI position (such as writing dissertation remotely), childcare or eldercare obligations, cohabitation with persons who are immuno-compromised, and others.

As it stands now, TAs/GSIs on different UC campuses (or even on the same campus) may have access to different accommodations. Nevertheless, CCGA affirms that the UC is primarily a residential university. In the attached memo, the committee recommends that all divisional Senates employ procedures for approval of courses for remote instruction, and that the approval for remote instruction be based on pedagogy. If accommodations to allow remote instruction must be made for other reasons, we urge divisional Senates to set clear policies to prevent there being disparities between individual departments.

We ask that the Academic Council considers endorsing this memo, and that you forward this memo to the divisional Senates for use in their assignments with TAs/GSIs.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Andrea Kasko  
Chair, CCGA

cc: Susan Cochran, Academic Council Vice Chair  
CCGA Members  
Hilary Baxter, Academic Senate Executive Director  
Michael LaBriola, Academic Senate Assistant Director

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, many campuses are struggling to balance the desire to return to our pre-pandemic operations (the way we were) with incorporating new and exciting technologies to improve access to education. Combined with the level of burnout that many faculty members and Senate committees are experiencing, the push for rapid change can be overwhelming.

At CCGA, we have heard many concerns about Teaching Assistants/Graduate Student Instructors (TAs/GSIs) who wish to continue teaching remotely for reasons other than pedagogy or health accommodations. Several UC campuses have delegated decisions about remote instruction for reasons other than pedagogy or health accommodation to individual departments. However, this has the potential to create broad inequalities amongst TAs/GSIs, as well as amongst undergraduates in their educational experience. It has been affirmed and reaffirmed that faculty instructors are expected to teach in-person, and we should expect the same from our GSIs/TAs whenever possible.

CCGA recognizes that the substantial increase in the number of undergraduates enrolled in the UC in recent years has contributed to housing shortages and shortages of TAs/GSIs, among other problems, on some campuses. Unfortunately, graduate students find themselves disproportionately affected by these problems. It is the responsibility of the UC and campus leaderships to address these structural problems, many of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 emergency.

While we are sympathetic to the struggles faced by graduate students, adjusting our mode of instruction is not a sustainable solution to long-standing issues in graduate education such as funding and housing availability. We reaffirm that the UC system is primarily a residential university. It is our belief that pedagogy should be the driving force for the adoption of new modalities of instruction. Using alternative modes of delivery as a stop-gap solution to the broad disinvestment in graduate education will only create more problems than it solves.

We recommend that all divisional Senates employ procedures for the approval of courses for remote instruction (if they have not yet done so), and that approval for remote instruction should be based on pedagogy. If accommodations to allow remote instruction must be made for other reasons, we urge divisional Senates to set clear policies to prevent there being disparities between individual departments.