UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA Academic Senate

Remarks to the UC Board of Regents
Susan Cochran, Chair of the Academic Senate
March 15, 2023

Thank you, Chair Leib, and good morning to everyone. We are now about halfway through this academic year and the Senate has been busy. When I sat down to gather my thoughts, I first asked the friendly bot at ChatGPT, if they would like to address the Regents. This is their answer: "As an AI language model, I do not have the ability to directly address the Regents or make remarks to them. However, would you like me to tell a joke? Why don't teachers like math books? Because they have too many problems!"

This is the new world we have entered, where machines can engage in more complicated interactions with us. And these machines are also the "coworkers" our students will have to compete with over the course of their careers. Mechanization will strip from many white-collar jobs the easiest, most routine parts, leaving for our graduates only the heavy lifting that bots are not yet able to do. What are the competencies our students will need to succeed in this new world? Let me list some:

- Skills to motivate others and oneself in real time, both in person and online;
- The ability to think critically about information that floods us from both credible and noncredible sources;
- And finally, our graduates will need even greater capacity to be innovative and entrepreneurial in a world that voraciously consumes novelty at faster and faster speeds.

We will have to teach our students to exploit where they still have the edge over the machine. Fortunately, there are many ways in which we at the UC do this.

To that end, let me share a couple of things the Senate has been doing to improve our educational pipeline.

One is in the area of transfer admissions. This you will hear more about at the Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting later today. As a preview, the Academic Senate, working with our partners in the Academic Senates at the California Community Colleges and the California State University, created a new lower-division general education pathway—the California General Education Transfer Curriculum or Cal-GETC. Community college students can soon use the Cal-GETC to complete their lower-division GE requirements when transferring to either the CSU or the UC. That's their choice. And that is just some of the work we have been doing to simplify transfer.

The second improvement takes a bit more explaining. At last July's Regents meeting, then Academic Senate Chair Robert Horwitz shared with you that the Academic Senate had spent much of last year considering the possibility of offering fully online undergraduate degrees at the UC. The discussion was extensive with some supporting the online approach as a means of widening access to a UC degree and encouraging educational innovation. Others raised significant concerns about instructional quality and the potential loss of the "outside-the-classroom" experiences that contribute greatly to the value of our degrees.

We interrogated the approaches of other universities as well as our experiences in our own classrooms. It turns out that universities that have gone enthusiastically into the online space have done so through affiliated but separate administrative structures, such as their extension programs or online campuses.

We trust that they did so for good reason. College degrees are more than just a collection of completed courses. They have a highly textured student services wrapper; courses for degree completion need careful articulation across departments, and, for a research institution such as the UC, they are infused with outside-the-classroom growth opportunities, some of which I have shared with you at previous meetings. Could we replicate these essential qualities within our existing undergraduate programs? Or would we need to force students, as is done at other universities, to choose whether to be registered for an on-campus or an online degree? While the Senate has yet to reach a consensus on the matter, as we explored these options, we identified a potential loophole in our existing residency requirement.

All undergraduate students are required to complete at least one year in residence in order to obtain a degree from the UC. This is not a new rule. The university has always required this. However, when the rule was written there was no need to specify what the term "in residence" meant. All courses, of course, were offered in person, and by definition that meant that students taking those courses were on campus and able to benefit from campus life. As late as fall 2019, 99% percent of undergraduate courses offered at the UC were in-person courses.

Today, the landscape has changed. The UC has many more online undergraduate courses than we did before the pandemic—as of last fall, 8% of courses are now offered in an online version. Because we anticipate and welcome additional growth in this online space, the Senate recognized that these changes in instructional modality were creating a loophole that some students might use, intentionally or inadvertently, to construct ad hoc, unapproved online degrees and thus potentially run afoul of the requirements set by our accreditor and federal rules on financial aid. To address this issue, the Assembly of the Academic Senate at its February meeting approved revisions to Senate Regulations 610 and 630, updating the residency requirement for a bachelor's degree. This closed the loophole and now requires a minimum of 6 units of in-person instruction per quarter or semester for a minimum of 1 year. Exceptions to this requirement are specified in the regulation for various UC-sponsored off-campus programs, and the requirement does not constrain accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

While this defines UC's current commitment to an in-person educational experience for all of our undergraduates, it also opens the door for campuses to experiment safely with online majors and minors and to innovate with hybrid programs and alternative modes of course delivery that will benefit our students. It will also provide two other benefits. Each student we admit will have access to the many campus resources that exist. And it will allow for growth in the size of the student body by effectively limiting the amount of time students need to be on campus. We will, of course, continue to offer many fully online graduate degrees.

What we learn from this may lead us eventually into the fully online undergraduate degree space, or we might learn that a hybrid model with a minimal in-residence requirement is exactly what works best for our students. The key here is that we are doing this in a quintessential UC manner: by creating an environment that allows departments to innovate and our students to choose modes of instruction that work best for them while remaining fully inclusive. In this way, we hope to encourage the building of the skill set that our students will need to thrive throughout their careers. Thank you, Chair Leib. That concludes my remarks.