October 14, 2021

PROFESSOR TARA JAVIDI, Chair
Academic Senate, San Diego Division

SUBJECT: Winter and Spring 2022 Teaching Modality

At a special meeting on October 11, 2021, the Educational Policy Committee (EPC) discussed teaching modality options for Winter and Spring 2022 instruction. Since Spring 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic began, EPC has approved a series of emergency limited-term blanket exceptions to the Policy on Distance Education Courses to allow any undergraduate or graduate course to be offered remotely without formal Senate approval of an R-designation for the course. The last limited-term blanket exception, approved by the 2020-2021 EPC, expires at the end of Fall 2021. All committee members recognize that there will be a continued need to offer some non-R designated courses remotely for the remainder of the academic year for numerous reasons: to accommodate instructors that are still impacted by the pandemic; there is a documented student need; or offering the course content in-person under current restrictions negatively impact students’ learning experience. However, after significant discussion and consideration of many options, the strong majority of the Committee determined that continuing to extend further blanket exceptions to allow any course to be offered remotely without an R-designation does not adequately acknowledge the current state of the pandemic, with vaccines becoming more widely available, or support the University’s commitment to transition to an even more robust campus presence in Winter and Spring 2022. Therefore, in order to meet the ongoing needs for a remote course modality option, EPC approved the following:

- A limited-term exception to the Policy on Distance Education Courses to allow a course approved for a course modality change for Winter and Spring 2022 to be offered remotely without an R-course designation.

EPC’s exception for Winter and Spring 2022 is limited to those courses with an “approved course modality change” and we recognize that approval criteria and review procedures will need to be finalized in short order to accommodate Winter 2022 course modality change requests. In September 2021, Academic Affairs issued Fall 2021 Course Modality Change Guidelines to provide guidance to instructors and departments on when a course may change modality and under what conditions. EPC was extremely dismayed by the lack of Senate consultation in the drafting and issuing of these guidelines for Fall 2021. For Winter and Spring 2022, it is essential that the Senate be actively involved in the development of course modality change guidelines and retains its authority over courses. But we also recognize that decisions about course modality during a pandemic are not exclusively issues about pedagogy and academic quality. There are aspects related to faculty welfare and equity that fall outside the bounds of EPC’s purview and must be considered by both the Academic Senate and the Administration. In that spirit, we suggest the following as a possible process to approve course modality change requests, using the September 2021 guidance as a starting point:

1. The instructor submits a course modality change request through their department chair (or delegate) with the necessary documentation/justification from DCC.
2. The course modality change request is reviewed by the cognizant divisional dean.
3. The course modality change request is approved by the Associate Vice Chancellor for Educational Innovation.
4. A list of courses approved and denied for course modality change requests by the AVC-EI is forwarded to the Undergraduate Council (for undergraduate courses) or Graduate Council (for graduate courses). UGC and GC will provide a final approval for those courses approved by the AVC-EI.
5. If a request is denied by the department, divisional dean, or AVC-EI based on instructional needs, the instructor may appeal the decision to the Academic Senate on the grounds that a remote modality in Winter or Spring
2022 is preferred to attend to student needs and course quality. Appeals could potentially be reviewed by a subcommittee consisting of members of the EPC, UGC, GC, CFW and CDE.

The Committee considered alternate approaches as well to accommodate remote instruction, such as requiring that each request be sent to UGC and GC for explicit approval or fully delegating approval to the AVC-EI. In the end, all members of EPC found those options to be suboptimal. UGC and GC do not have the capacity to provide a quality review of each request in the short amount of time available and it adds a layer of review to an already cumbersome process that may discourage instructors from even submitting a request. At the same time, we wholeheartedly believe that the Senate should be involved in providing some degree of oversight to the Administration’s decisions and be an avenue for appeal on course modality decisions. In addition, the following recommendations and observations were made during EPC’s discussion:

- The Fall 2021 criteria for approval may not sufficiently represent some of the challenges that faculty are experiencing and reasons for which they may request an exception. EPC recommends that CFW and CDE be provided the opportunity to recommend changes to the criteria.
- It was not clear to committee members how and when instructors should seek accommodations through Disability Counseling and Consulting (DCC) and what documentation from DCC’s review is subsequently shared with department chairs and other administrators. EPC recommends that this be clarified and there are measures in place to protect the confidentiality of information shared with DCC.

Thank you for your efforts to engage EPC as early as possible in discussions about instructional planning for Winter and Spring 2022. We look forward to working with you, Senate Council, and other standing committees to finalize the implementation details for this limited-term exception.

Sincerely,

Padmini Rangamani, Chair
Educational Policy Committee

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