

January 5, 2016

**ADELA DE LA TORRE**

Vice Chancellor—Student Affairs and Diversity  
Office of Student Affairs

**Re: Blue Ribbon Committee: Student Life and Co-Curricular Experiences Implementation Plan Review**

The report was distributed to all Academic Senate standing committees including the Faculty Executive Committee in each college and professional school. Comments were received from the Committee on Faculty Welfare (CFW), Graduate Council (GC) and Undergraduate Council (UGC). The issues discussed in the report are very important and deserving of our attention. Most of the issues addressed require thoughtful and deliberate steps. We believe it is important to consider the input provided by CFW as our campus considers each implementation step; “The majority of our concerns involve the availability of funds/resources and we are reluctant to add more responsibility to faculty’s existing responsibilities.” The campus should not embark on efforts aimed at improving student life and co-curricular experiences absent dedicated, sustainable resources. It would be a tragedy to rush implementation of a program, find it is successful and then eliminate the same program when continued resources are unavailable.

Every committee response addressed student mental health needs, the training of faculty and the appointment of a departmental lead for Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR). This is not surprising given that faculty and graduate students are more likely to regularly interact with our undergraduate students and experience many of the issues to be addressed. We fully support providing training, resources and information that is readily accessible. The concept of a lead QPR is not fully supported. As stated by CFW, “Due to the nature of QPR, it is best used as a frontline tool in aiding an individual who may be in distress.” UGC wondered, “...whether QPR training is sufficiently broad with respect to distressed and distressing students and today’s need for departments to appropriately address both types of students.” The UGC understands both the needs and concepts behind this strategy but concluded that the appointment of a single departmental lead is probably too narrow an approach to this important topic. Other concerns expressed during discussion included (but were not limited to): potential liability for a single lead, whether a single departmental individual with QPR training is sufficient. The UGC proposes alternative approaches to realizing the aims of this strategy such as:

- Any training that is provided to the campus should address both distressed and distressing students.
- Mandatory training is not supported. To mandate training immediately creates a negative impression.
- Absent the capacity to implement a required training, perhaps online QPR training could be a part of the training for all academic advisors on campus and the training also be readily available “on demand” for all faculty and administration.
- Rather than a single lead, each department should designate a team of at least two individuals (a faculty member and a staff member) to serve as local sources with knowledge of appropriate referrals to campus mental health resources. The team will have training, and specific responsibility of supporting one another to assure availability. The department members (students, staff, and faculty) need to be made aware of the team members and how to contact them.
- To increase awareness of the resource and to assure its ready availability, the campus “Red Folder” should be routinely visible on the front page of campus web pages routinely used by

personnel working with undergraduate students (e.g., MyUCDavis, SmartSite, the new LMS, OASIS).

- Although the “Red Folder” contains many useful telephone numbers, UGC suggests that the campus should seriously consider the implementation of a single phone number that will serve as the equivalent of a “mental health 911” for true mental health emergency situations.
- The campus has made tremendous strides in furthering resources that support campus mental health; however, there are still improvements possible (e.g., there are still considerable “wait” times for access to non-emergency mental health counseling), and provision of additional resources for true campus “experts” in mental health remain desirable.

GC raised an important issue regarding graduate student Teaching Assistants (TA). Graduate student TAs should be made aware of the mental health problems that may affect their students and of the channels for communicating any concerns related to student mental health. It is the recommendation of GC that such awareness is best achieved as part of regular TA preparation, along with the provision of instructional pamphlets, rather than through a special training session dedicated to this issue. The reasons for this preference are several. First, recent surveys have indicated a significant fraction of graduate students experience mental health difficulties. Such difficulties might be compounded by feelings of responsibility for the mental well-being of other students. Second, graduate students come from diverse backgrounds and might possess widely differing abilities to handle the subtleties of identifying potential mental health issues. Providing awareness of mental health issues as part of regular TA preparations could avoid extensive forms of TA training that may inadvertently imply TA’s responsibility for the mental health of other students. TAs should not be put in a position where they are instructed to identify or red flag students that may be at risk.

Recommended strategy three suggests establishment of a student welfare subcommittee of the UGC. This strategy was discussed by UGC and members agree student welfare is a priority. The UGC concluded that a UGC subcommittee on student welfare may not be sufficient to achieve the aims of the strategy. Although UGC has the authority to impact policy regarding undergraduate academic programs (and thereby some aspects of student welfare), there are multiple aspects of student life that influence student welfare and consequently student welfare involves many areas of campus responsibility beyond the academic domain. Further, since the aim of the strategy is to (in part) “enable Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCS), and other student services leadership, to receive updated information regarding concerns of faculty and professional staff...” UGC suggests that a multifaceted approach to this strategy is desirable. UGC suggests the following alternatives to promote new ideas and achieving greater understanding within the Academic Senate and appropriate administrative units (such as Student Affairs and Undergraduate Education):

- A representative of the SHCS could be added by the Academic Senate (through a bylaw amendment) to serve *ex officio* on UGC. The appointed individual would need to possess skills and knowledge concerning student mental health, and by attending UGC meetings could learn of academic issues under UGC consideration. The individual could also be charged with bringing other issues and concerns regarding undergraduate students to the UGC for consideration.
- A small workgroup or task force could be appointed to enhance communication among campus units that have responsibility for aspects of undergraduate student welfare. The workgroup membership should be small but include members representing the Associated Students of UC Davis (ASUCD), Academic Senate, Academic Federation, Student Affairs, SHCS, Student Judicial Affairs and Undergraduate Education. Each representative to the workgroup would be responsible for keeping those in the organization represented informed regarding workgroup discussions and recommendations. The aim would be that issues and insights identified by the workgroup could immediately be relayed to the most appropriate office(s) on the campus for consideration and action.

There is majority support for CFW's comments concerning large classrooms. CFW believes the campus should reconsider large classrooms with hundreds of students. As classes have gotten bigger, the instructional staff (faculty and TAs alike) have more difficulty knowing their students in a substantive way, and this makes it less likely that students with real problems will get the help they need. For instance, if a student has one class with 200 people and the rest of her/his classes with 30 to 50 students, the individual's absence or distress is more likely to be noticed in the smaller classes. But more commonly today, our students are in large classes regularly, resulting in many students on the verge of anonymity, and invisible if they wish to be. In these circumstances, we cannot help because we are unable to identify the issues.

In closing, the Davis Division of the Academic Senate is supportive of the ideas and goals articulated in the implementation plan. However, we believe further exploration, planning and a true commitment of sustained resources is necessary before any implementation strategy may receive the full support of the Division. In addition, the Division concurs with Graduate Council's comment, "...we see many analogies between the first year experience of undergraduates, whether straight from high school or transfers, and first year graduate student life. Therefore, we suggest administrative support for a similar study (with recommendations after identification of issues) on improving the first year experience of graduate students..."

Sincerely,



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