November 24, 2015

Leo Estrada, Chair
Academic Senate

Re: College Proposal to Establish Teaching Professor Title

Dear Leo,

At its meeting on November 13, 2015, the Graduate Council discussed the proposal from the College of Letters and Science to establish the academic personnel title of “Professor of Teaching X” at UCLA. The Graduate Council responded to the original proposal on February 17, 2015, noting its concerns about the proposal’s potential impact on faculty research and, by extension, on doctoral education programs. Many members suggested we limit the number of individuals appointed to the teaching professorship series that provides for security of employment. The November 13th discussion showed many of these concerns remained and the current Council’s overall response is split, albeit that a preponderance of unsupportive sentiments were expressed.

Most importantly, the council was concerned that: 1) the suggested proposal will not alleviate the creation of different tiers and second class citizenship; and 2) the number of Professor of Teaching positions requested has increased from 16 to 45 positions (with the potential to increase to higher numbers) since the proposal’s last vetting. This nearly three-fold increase in the proposed positions is significantly higher, especially in the face of earlier Senate committees’ responses expressing concern about the addition of the title to the Academic Personnel Manual (APM) proposed in summer 2015.

Many members suggested the University has not demonstrated need adequately, since working titles for lecturer and adjunct faculty members appear sufficient. Health Science faculty members from the School of Medicine commented that teaching and clinical service series “Professor of Clinical X” (APM-275-8) and regularly appointed adjunct faculty play a critical role in departmental teaching missions. Other science and professional-studies (department) faculty members suggested we are challenged by programmatic accreditation requirements that a sufficient number of faculty members have both security of employment and meet externally set practice-based qualifications to teach in the curriculum. Some colleagues expressed that some departments undervalue the focus and talent of those focused on teaching and some are reluctant to convert full-time equivalent positions to non-research positions that commit resources due to a perceived loss of funding from extramurally funded research. Additionally, members wonder whether the new title may prevent the University from exploring improvements to existing titles as a means for resolving the College’s concerns over adequate numbers of high-quality teaching faculty. For example, members expressed concern over the overall impact a change in focus from research to teaching might have on the Academy, and that the new title will create a second-class citizenship for teaching-intensive faculty. A graduate student representative worried that this policy might further diminish the availability of research professorships for young scholars. Last, members expressed concern about the creeping language included in the College FEC response, including “…we are now looking to expand this series through a closely monitored process.” The addition of 29 proposed positions added to the original 16 proposed last summer underscores these concerns that relate to trust. Dramatic and rapid changes in recruitment may significantly alter the balance and research mission of UCLA.
Related to these changes, the University and the FEC have not identified monitoring activities for implementing this new APM Professor series. At best, the language is ambiguous and does not reflect the realities of monitoring the success of this change, especially with a three-fold increase in hiring over estimates proposed this past year. If pursued, the joint Senate-Administration committee should work to establish review guidelines and benchmarks for assessing the success of the working title before the policy is codified. While some members expressed that teaching security-of-employment faculty members would be welcomed and would balance departmental needs, skeptics expressed concern that this change will fundamentally change UCLA. State-wide pressures to increase our enrollment are evident, but acquiescence to these pressures may shift our foundations to more unstable grounds. In summary, the preponderance of opinion is that there is too little information or research available to assure that the Academy’s focus on the tripartite mission will remain intact: research, teaching and service. Consequently, members could not endorse this proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to opine on this important topic. The Graduate Council is very interested to hear about any advancements with this initiative.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via the council’s analyst, Kyle Cunningham, at kcunningham@senate.ucla.edu.

Best Regards,

Ioanna Kakoulli
Chair, Graduate Council

cc: Serge Chenkerian, MSO, Academic Senate
Kyle Cunningham, Committee Analyst, Graduate Council
Linda Mohr, CAO, Academic Senate