March 13, 2008

Professor Michael Brown
Chair of the Academic Council
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607

In Re: Review of the Dialectic Paper on Online Instruction

Dear Michael,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Dialectic Paper on Online Instruction. Upon receipt of the request for systemwide review, I asked the Graduate Council (GC) and Undergraduate Council (UgC) to opine; as is our custom, the Executive Board also reviewed the document. The GC responded and the Executive Board has endorsed the GC response, which is attached for your review.

The UCLA Academic Senate looks forward to continued dialog on the important issues raised in the paper. Generally speaking, UCLA believes that, given the variance in investment, infrastructure, and interest in online instruction throughout the UC system, it would be beneficial to construct a database of “basic information regarding current procedures and programs using online instructional technology across the system.” This database would be made widely available and serve as a resource for future initiatives.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ligon Bjork
Chair, UCLA Academic Senate

Cc: Maria Bertero-Barcelo, Executive Director and Chief of Staff, Academic Council
    Jaime R. Balboa, Ph.D., Chief Administrative Officer, UCLA Academic Senate
February 19, 2008

Elizabeth Ligon Bjork
Academic Senate Chair

Re: Graduate Council’s Response to the Dialectic Paper on Online Instruction

Dear Elizabeth,

The Graduate Council reviewed the Dialectic Paper on Online Instruction at its meeting on February 15, 2008. Council members had the document for three weeks to consider it. Unfortunately, the complexities of the issue demanded more time for careful consideration than we had in the meeting. What follows below is a brief summary of what Council members considered as key issues in what will need to be an ongoing engagement with a changing learning environment.

The Graduate Council concurs with the tenor of the circulated “Dialectic’ Paper on Remote / Online Instruction,” and it endorses the opinion that the University of California should implement proactive initiatives and disciplined oversight in order to ensure that modes of online instruction are developed in ways that maintain or enhance the academic and professional goals of graduate (and undergraduate) programs.

In particular, it endorses the suggestion that an adjustable timetable for development and evaluation of models of graduate-level online instruction should be proposed across the UC system, allowing for circumstances or challenges specific to individual campuses and different disciplines.

Because investments and interest in online instruction vary widely across the system, the Graduate Council suggests that a data base of basic information regarding current procedures and programs using online instructional technology across the system should be made widely available as a resource for future initiatives.

A system-wide review of current use of online instruction in graduate programs should lead optimally to a set of norms or minimal conditions that would be applied across the UC system, allowing for modifications attuned to particular program needs and goals at individual campuses.

Insofar as system-wide policy (or standards) may need to be established, the Graduate Council proposes two related sets of questions and concerns, which bear on teaching philosophy and practical concerns:

- Has the category of “residence” for graduate instruction outlived its relevance?
- Does the acknowledged value of “face-to-face” contact in the instructional environment need to be reevaluated in the context of the known dialogic contact available in course website discussion boards and other interactive modes of online instruction?
- The rapid evolution of online instructional technology should be taken as an occasion to reevaluate what is meant by the notion of “UC quality” instruction. One readily available mechanism would be to link evaluation of existing and developing modes of online
instruction to the regular cycle of internal and external reviews of departments and programs. Such practice would ensure regular oversight of programs for online instruction and would promote development and correction of online programs or courses where advisable.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to opine on this critical issue. The Council is confident that it will be revisiting related issues in the future as technologies develop and as faculty and students engage with them in ways that can enhance both the learning and research experiences on and off campus.

Sincerely,

Jan Reiff
Graduate Council Chair

Cc: Jaime Balboa, Academic Senate CAO
    Kyle Cunningham, Sr. Policy Analyst, Graduate Council