APPENDIX G.
Faculty and Staff Consultation Meetings Brief

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Overview

During the 2015 Spring Quarter, Life Sciences Dean Victoria Sork and CEILS Director Erin Sanders held consultation meetings with two groups having vested interest and expertise in factors impacting undergraduate student success at UCLA: academic advisors at the departmental and college levels as well faculty leaders designated by the deans of each academic division and school. This brief summarizes the content and outcomes of those consultation meetings. Altogether, these discussions provided the project team critical insights into the perceived barriers to student success and suggested to the team possible strategies by which UCLA can address and potentially overcome challenges facing students.

Summary of Findings

Consultations with Academic Advisors

Three separate consultation meetings were convened with departmental Student Affairs Officers (SAOs) and College Academic Counselors (CACs) in Spring 2015. Participating academic advisors represented numerous departments and programs and provided a broad range of professional exposure to and expertise with undergraduate education and the student academic experience. Led by Dean Sork, three groups ranging from 6 to 21 staff members answered questions about what they perceived to be key obstacles to student success. Their perspectives provided important insights into the challenges and barriers facing UCLA students. Professional staff described numerous obstacles to student success, several of which were repeated by different SAOs and academic advisors across the different meetings. Director Sanders reviewed notes taken at each meeting and subsequently created a list of common concerns and student experiences (Table G-1). Five themes emerged from this list:

- *Shortage of consistent, high-quality academic support resources available to all students*
- *Challenges related to serving students with diverse backgrounds, including non-residential students, first-generation students, transfer students, international students, and socioeconomically-challenged students*
- *Institutional constraints related to curriculum, instruction, enrollment, and scheduling*
- *Student beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to academics*
- *Faculty beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to teaching and instruction*

Table G-1

Academic Advisor Perceptions of Barriers to Student Success

Themes	Observations
A shortage of consistent, high-quality academic resources and services for all students	• Limited on-campus tutoring resources open to all students (e.g., Covell Commons) • No supplemental upper-division support beyond office hours and uneven department-sponsored tutoring • Insufficient resources to support student writing • Increasing demand for Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) to assist students with non-academic factors affecting their success • Faculty course evaluations are not public; as a result, students not equipped to make mindful decisions when selecting courses rely on anecdotal information from *Bruinwalk* or *RateMyProfessor.* • Insufficient general academic counseling capacity to meet all students' needs • Inconsistent academic counseling across departments due to: *size/resource constraints* (e.g., SAOs for small majors can frequently check student progress and connect immediately with struggling students; infeasible for larger departments); *insufficient training* (e.g., staff development not considered necessary by all Chairs); and *varying documentation protocols* (e.g., Counselor Desktop encouraged but not required by all advisors) • Lack of high-touch advising technology to assist larger departments in connecting with struggling students in timely manner; no alert system in place to track students
Challenges related to serving students from diverse backgrounds	• Non-residential students: long commutes; family obligations and expectations; lack of exposure to and awareness of campus academic resources; limited availability to attend to study groups and instructors' office hours • First-generation college students: tend to lack effective college study skills; cultural misconceptions about the merits of academic counseling or tutoring • Transfer students: difficulty with transition from semester to quarter system; math-intensive coursework; commuting challenges; varied preparation for upper-division coursework; longer time-to-degree for B.S. or B.A. (7-8 quarters)

Themes	Observations
	• International students: self-esteem problems related to English-language proficiency • Low socio-economic status students: often experience academic achievement gap; disparities in high school academic preparation for college coursework; ineffective study habits; employment responsibilities of 20+ hours per week; little knowledge of available financial aid options and resources
Institutional constraints related to curriculum, instruction, enrollment, and scheduling	• Lack of flexibility or unnecessary rigidity in curriculum sequence • Inability to enroll in particular courses leads to subsequent overloading instead; too many difficult courses in same term leads to academic failures • Courses offered too infrequently/at sub-optimal times for students; schedule based on classroom availability and/or decided by departments based on faculty input (e.g., creating enrollment conflicts if faculty select off-time block for course offering) • Pushing students to complete their degree in 4 years; students rushed through curriculum take more credits than they can handle, negatively impacting their academic success • Negative impacts of repeating courses on time-to-degree and self-confidence
Student beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to academics	• Disciplined, motivated students accustomed to getting A's in secondary school not used to asking for help when struggling in college • Students deny they are in academic trouble and do not seek out tutoring or academic counseling until it is too late • Students using tutoring are not always those in academic trouble • Students propagate misconceptions about benefits of "curving" • Students struggle to translate majors into careers; coursework is seen as checklist to complete while maintaining a high GPA as opposed to being a learning experience *en route* to a career • Students do not understand differences between elements of the curriculum (e.g., assignment essays vs. graduate school application essays) or view learning as giving them translatable skills; they therefore do not prioritize learning experiences

Themes	Observations
Faculty beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to teaching and instruction	• Lack of transparency among faculty regarding expectations, grading policies, midterm evaluations, student progress
	• Curve-based (i.e., norm-referenced) grading predominates in large introductory courses
	• Inadequate diagnostic/placement testing; current approaches do not promote metacognition or guide students towards remediation
	• Lack of faculty training about effective teaching and grading practices; few incentives to teach effectively or inclusively
	• Faculty and TAs misunderstand students' lack of confidence for lack of competence (i.e., "imposter syndrome")
	• Climate barriers in the classroom (e.g., "stereotype threat")
	• Competitive environments where higher-SES students have advantages over low-SES students (i.e., not having to work or commute) exacerbate disparities; competition for course grades does not promote collaboration in the learning process
	• Faculty seem uninterested in student learning; classroom environments vary by discipline
	• Unrealistic, unfair faculty expectations of students based on assumptions of students' prior knowledge, not testing; assuming all students have taken relevant AP courses even if there is no course pre-requisite
	• Limited faculty accessibility during office hours; underutilization of faculty and TA office hours by students; inadequate capacity to meet student demand
	• Faculty mentoring capacity issues; high student-to-instructor ratio

Consultations with Dean's Designees

In Spring Quarter 2015, Dean Sork and Director Sanders met with a group of faculty leaders, such as Associate Deans or others engaged in undergraduate education, who were designated by each Dean to represent his/her division and school. We included all units that offered many courses to UCLA's undergraduate majors and minors. Table G-2 lists those who participated either in-person or via conference call.

Table G-2

Consultation Participants: Dean's Designees

Division/School	Faculty Member	Additional Participants
Arts and Architecture	David Rousseve	Merrillyn Pace (Director, Student Services)
Education and Information Studies	Louis Gomez	
Engineering and Applied Science	Rick Wesel	
Humanities	Maite Zubiaurre	
Life Sciences	Blaire Van Valkenburgh	
Management	Judy Olian	Randy Bucklin (Faculty Chair)
Physical Sciences	Troy Carter	
Social Sciences	Juliet Williams	
Undergraduate Education	Jennifer Lindholm	

The goal of this meeting not only was to solicit faculty views on the hurdles students must overcome in pursuing baccalaureate degrees at UCLA but also to discuss possible strategies by which to overcome these barriers. Beyond providing information that was consistent with the academic advisors' contributions, the dean's designees identified additional obstacles to student success. Some of these were best described by creating an additional theme: *departmental policies and practices* (Table G-3).

Table G-3
Faculty Perceptions of Barriers to Student Success

Themes	Observations
Faculty beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to teaching and instruction	• Faculty using norm-referenced grading practices are able to allow class performance to set grades without needing to monitor local pedagogy, evaluation, classroom climate problems • Misconceptions about norm-referenced grading, including improper use of the word "curve" • Many are unaware of issues affecting student success such as hidden bias or stereotype threat and do not have tools to address it • Some concern about grade inflation; no-pass grades justified as means to counter grade inflation
Departmental policies and practices	• The issue of learning objectives, assessment of student learning related to objectives, and strategies for grading to correspond to assessment is not part of the discussion about teaching effectiveness during promotion/merit review process for individual faculty; patterns also not evaluated at the departmental level during the 8-year review process. • Lack of pedagogy (including grading practices) and diversity training for TAs and instructors
Institutional constraints related to curriculum and instruction	• Lack of infrastructure to support effective pedagogy (e.g., appropriate teaching spaces; proper size of discussion sections; faculty teaching workshops) • Allocation of TA support (i.e., student:TA ratio) is inadequate for large enrollment courses

Consultations with Faculty Leadership in the Division of Physical Sciences

Due to concerns raised by the Chairs in the Physical Sciences about our efforts to survey the departments about teaching practices, we decided to take advantage of the opportunity and meet with them to discuss the report and their impressions about obstacles to student success in the sciences. Many of the aforementioned barriers to student success were acknowledged. Like many of our discussions, some of the chairs initially emphasize their perception that students aren't adequately prepared for their courses. Our response was to clarify that the goal of the Building Inclusive Classrooms was to identify ways that we can improve the classroom so that all students have a better opportunity to succeed. We summarize the issues that were raised about obstacles to student success in the classroom (see Table G-4). While we did not have time to meet with chairs across campus, which would have been productive, the issues they raise are not isolated to their unit.

Table G-4

Physical Sciences' Chairs' Perceptions of Barriers to Student Success

Themes	Observations
Departmental policies and practices	• No mechanism to identify gateway courses and instructors that are ineffective, so that chairs (or Deans) can address strategies for improvement. • Most professors have not really been taught how to teach • Course instructors and chairs have not way to assess impact of grading practices on student success; norm-referenced ("curve"-based) grading practices do not provide transparency to students in how they are being graded • Faculty of many large lecture courses in many departments are not expected to meet regularly with TAs to coordinate discussion exercises with course teaching objectives or to oversee quality of TA teaching. • Teaching assistants in many large lecture courses do not attend lecturers. • Discussion section sizes have too many students for TAs to engage in active learning strategies
Institutional barriers	• Larger section sizes contributing to less effective TA sections • The academic personnel review process does not provide incentives to course instructors of large, lower-division courses to improve teaching or develop innovative approaches

Recommendations

Collectively, the consultations revealed over 40 impediments to UCLA student success. Staff and faculty comments were used to craft recommendations for improving student success. Upon consideration of the more commonly discussed barriers, the dean's designee consultation group arrived at five immediate and actionable recommendations for improving the UCLA undergraduate learning experience:

  i.   Share the Building Inclusive Classrooms project data with Deans and Chairs, and ask leadership to address courses of concern through discussions with relevant instructors;

 ii.   Make course-level data analytics available to faculty and departments. Instead of producing summary results, provide faculty and departments with the tools and technology to design and perform their own analyses;

iii.   Start communicating "best practices" for curriculum, instruction, and evaluation more broadly (e.g., grading transparency, merits of criterion-referenced grading, impact of stereotype threat, imposter syndrome, and other psychosocial barriers to student success);

i.   Move campus towards criterion-referenced grading and away from norm-referenced and other grading practices resulting in high no-pass rates and disproportionate fail rates for underrepresented minority (URM) and low socio-economic status (SES) students;

ii.   Educate faculty about diversity issues by providing workshops on creating inclusive classrooms, raising awareness about stereotype threat, and providing faculty tools to address negative classroom climate.

In addition, discussions with Physical Science faculty resulted in the following recommendations for improving student success:

i.   Implement the technology needed to track students academically, monitor their progress, and improve advising quality and efficiency;

ii.   Incentivize faculty to teach and teach effectively;

iii.   Utilize Undergraduate Assistants (UAs) more as peer-instructors to improve the student-to-instructor ratio issues in large classes;

iv.   Reinstate tutoring services for all undergraduates (e.g., Covell Commons).