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Jim Schaaf, Associate Dean, College of Engineering
Matthew Stratton, Preparatory Education Committee Member, English
Carolyn Thomas, Dean and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (Chair)

Re: Working Group: Closing the Preparation Gap

Dear Colleagues:

UC Davis admits a diverse cohort of talented freshman and transfer students from the state, the nation, and the world. Through our holistic review admissions system we are committed to enrolling students who have excelled within their local contexts. In holistic review, high school GPA, SAT, and personal factors all come into play in assessing a student's achievements and potential. As a result, each of our first-year Aggies is always someone who has been successful academically in their high school or community college. Yet not all schools offer the same level of academic preparation due to vast discrepancies in resources among districts. These discrepancies often translate into lower levels of preparation, even for the same grades, between schools. Once students enroll at Davis, their disparate backgrounds can lead to differences in academic placement and achievement. Admitted students take placement examinations in writing and, for those students pursuing STEM degrees, in chemistry and mathematics. Scores result in placement into introductory UC Davis classes or into a range of remedial options. The most common are "workload" classes. Currently, about 40% of new freshmen place into at least one workload course.

Recently, the Council of Associate Deans and the Preparatory Education subcommittee of Undergraduate Council have identified concerns with workload courses and outcomes, including

workload-taking students' tendency to have lower graduation rates and higher achievement gaps in GPA and academic standing than students who do not take workload courses. In this scenario, it is often the low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented minority students (many of whom attended lower-resourced schools) who struggle in gateway STEM and first-year writing courses.

In addition to the workload mechanism, we currently have a number of programs designed to narrow the gap in preparation. These programs provide important services and are designed by skilled and caring professionals. Nevertheless, our student attainment gaps in GPA, credit hours, second-year persistence, and four- and six-year-graduation rates persist. The time has come to assess, in a comprehensive, campus-wide manner, where we are and how we can improve. Further, programs that are successful on other campuses have not yet been implemented or implemented fully here at UC Davis. I charge this working group to look at how our program-based and course-based methods of reducing these gaps can be appropriately designed, scaled, and coordinated so that all students cross the finish line with meaningful degrees at a similar pace.

We would like you to serve on this working group in order to provide global recommendations to the Chancellor, Provost and Academic Senate. Next steps, if any, will be taken in partnership with the Senate.

The working group should respond to the following questions:

1. What current pre-matriculation programs are designed to close the preparation gap among undergraduate students across all colleges and units? How are these programs funded and what are their outcomes and efficacies? What incentives are possible to compel student participation and, if students participate prior to enrollment, how do we compensate for lost employment opportunities?
2. How do we determine who is directed to workload courses? What are our workload course outcomes?
3. What programs are available throughout the academic year to assist students in their academic transition to campus and in the following years? How are these programs funded? Are tutoring and academic support options sufficient in style and scale to meet the needs of our students? How effective are the programs in closing preparation and achievement gaps?
4. What programs are available throughout the academic year to assist students in their emotional and social transition to campus? How are these programs funded and how effective are they at supporting student achievement and retention?
5. In each of the above areas, what are the most effective/successful national programs that reach students unprepared in multiple areas?
6. Are there other emerging efforts throughout the university that seek to address these gaps? Are any of these programs especially promising?
7. Based on the above analyses and considerations, are there existing programs that should be enhanced and/or are there alternative approaches that we should be employing? What would it take to enhance or pilot these approaches?

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We would like the committee to begin work in Spring 2018 and have completed recommendations no later than Winter 2019. Thank you for undertaking this important effort to ensure that our campus follows through on the implicit promise we make to offer all UC Davis students an equal opportunity to achieve the very best academic outcomes.

Best regards,



Gary S. May
Chancellor



Ralph J. Hexter
Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor

/am