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ACADEMIC SENATE, MERCED DIVISION
UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL
PEGGY O'DAY, CHAIR

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February 14, 2008

TO: Elizabeth Boretz, Director, Student Advising and Learning Center

Re: Request for 5-year Extension of Mid-Semester Grade Reporting in Lower Division Courses

In Spring 2005, UGC approved a proposal by Jane Lawrence to institute a three-year trial of mandatory mid-semester grade reporting for all lower division courses. In addition to grade reporting, freshman students with a grade of D+ or lower were required to participate in a "Success Workshop" to help students assess why they are failing and direct them to other resources that may aid in improving their academic performance.

Undergraduate Council was asked by Director Boretz for approval to extend the mandatory grade reporting for lower division courses and the mandatory workshops for failing students for five more years. She presented a written and oral summary report to UGC at its meeting on February 6, 2008. Members discussed the current program with Director Boretz, and asked a number of questions about student advising and tutoring in general.

UGC endorsed continuation of the program for another five years as requested. In general, it appears that the program is effectively intervening with low-performing freshman students at a critical point in their first year, and offering positive reinforcement and tools for improvement. The workshops are providing an important means of communicating to students about the available support services on campus, and are helping to create a climate of community support around academic success. However, discussion among UGC members at, and subsequent to, the Feb. 6 meeting raised several important points about this program, and about activities of Student Advising and Learning Center, that should be reviewed and assessed more fully; specifically:

1. Mid-semester grade reporting is handled electronically through UCMCROPS and the Registrar's site. Although, there is a burden on faculty to compile and assign grades at mid-semester, this does not appear to be excessive given that reporting is done electronically. Mid-semester grade reporting has a significant academic benefit for students given the relatively low demand on resources. However, more data should be gathered on whether or not mid-semester grade reporting is placing an excessive burden on faculty teaching large lower division courses.

2. The Success Workshops require staff for conducting workshops, and for follow-up and assessment of students. The program is relatively limited in scope at present, including only freshman students and requiring attendance at only one session. UGC discussed potential benefits of developing workshops specifically for sophomores and transfer students that would address factors affecting academic performance of these students. Expansion of workshops would require additional resources. This review did not include any budget, space, or staff FTE allocations associated with the Center. UGC recommends that assessment of these resource demands be included in future reviews.

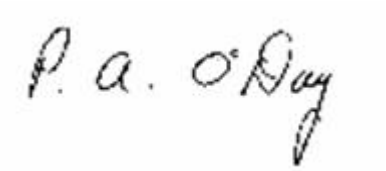
3. The Success Workshops focus primarily on student motivation, time and stress management, student behavior, and student self-assessment. Based on the limited data presented, the workshops appear to have a positive effect on student attitude and motivation. There is little data on whether or not academic performance in specific courses is improved as a result of workshop attendance. The primary assessment tool for the workshop is a student evaluation

of the experience. To date, a limited amount of tracking of student retention and dismissal patterns for those participating in workshops has been done. UGC recommends development of objective assessment tools (in addition to student feedback) and methods for tracking students to more quantitatively assess the impact of the workshops on academic performance. UGC recommends developing closer links between activities of Student Advising and Learning Center and major-based advising and tutoring to insure that improvements in student motivation are translated into tangible improvements in student academic performance.

4. In UGC's discussion with Director Boretz, she noted that expansion of the mandatory Success Workshops with increase in student population, and the demands for student tutoring, have made it difficult to find an adequate amount of appropriate space to conduct these activities. Tutoring and workshops require space that is quiet, away from distractions, with whiteboards, and of appropriate size (larger rooms for workshops; smaller for tutoring). UGC recommends that the Administration review space needs for the Center's activities and identify appropriate space that may be used for these activities, including instructional classrooms (particularly in the evening) and library space.

In general, UGC supports the activities of the Student Advising and Learning Center and views its role as an integral component of student academic success at UCM. Given its importance, a full review and assessment of the Center's activities, resources, and impacts is in order, perhaps in AY08-09, to insure maximum effectiveness and appropriate use of resources. UGC recommends that the Mid-semester Grade Reporting Program be reviewed annually by UGC, but also that the activities of the Student Advising and Learning Center as a whole be evaluated more comprehensively, including a review of resources by CAPRA.

Sincerely,



Peggy O'Day, Chair

cc: Jane Lawrence, Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs
Christopher Viney, Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education
Shawn Kantor, Chair, Academic Senate
Kevin Browne, Registrar
Nancy Clarke, Senate Executive Director
Fatima Paul, Senate Analyst