

Admissions and Financial Aid Committee (AFAC)

Notes
Monday, September 14, 2020
1:00-2:30pm

I. Welcome and Introductions – Chair Ghassemi – 5 min

Chair Ghassemi welcomed new and returning members to this inaugural meeting. AFAC is a new stand-alone Senate committee. Members and guests each provided a brief introduction of themselves.

II. Chair’s Report – Abbas Ghassemi – 5 min**A. DivCo September 14 Meeting**

Chair Ghassemi provided the committee with an update on three main items discussed during the DivCo September 14 Meeting:

- Chancellor Muñoz stated that Fall 2020 enrollment numbers are a reason to be optimistic post-pandemic. There is potential systemwide impact to the budget; UC Merced, however was not greatly affected by low enrollment numbers; though overall enrollment numbers were not as estimated.
- EVC/Provost Camfield and VPDUE Frey discussed planning approaches to the spring semester that would be beneficial for everyone (faculty, students, etc.). Chair Ghassemi provided an update on this work on progress.
- The Faculty Welfare and Academic Freedom committee proposed COVID mitigation guidelines that would assist during the pandemic. This included childcare and the discussion of teaching release allocation for consideration by department chairs.

III. Consent Calendar – 5 min

The agenda was approved as presented.

IV. Consultation with Professor Sarah Kurtz – 15 min

Draft Proposal for a Five-Year (4+1) BS/MS Degree Program.

Materials are available here: <https://ucmerced.box.com/s/2n1abj1vchuxvk6bm9kgzh56gtgejy4h>

Professor Kurtz introduced her proposal for a combined B.S./M.S. degree program in Materials Science and Biomaterials Science & Engineering:

UC Merced does not currently have a policy for this type of program. Other UC campuses have a

policy in place; however, they are structured differently. Professor Kurtz believes having a guiding campus-wide policy would be useful. School of Engineering Dean Matsumoto introduced a similar policy at UC Riverside and found that it was very useful. When UC Riverside first implemented the policy, the number of applications they received for the school greatly increased. Implementing this here at UC Merced would offer an attractive option to strong students who might otherwise want to attend a different university.

This one-page draft sets some guidelines, and a key feature that makes it useful in that some of the courses may be counted for both a B.S. and M.S. degree. There is also a requirement for students to have a higher GPA than what is normally required, which shows they would be able to undergo an accelerated curriculum. Furthermore, they would be required to complete some professional development that would give them added experience that could replace some credit.

Professor Kurtz discussed complications within the draft proposal:

- Because the program applies to both undergraduate and graduate students, it is unclear whether it should go through Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council for approval. Because this has not been done before, the approval process is unclear.
 - Note: this item was discussed via email in June 2020 with the previous UGC Chair and it was recommended that UGC be invited to review the proposal. The former UGC chair was not supportive of this program being offered as a pilot program.
- Professor Kurtz received feedback from different stakeholders. If an Undergraduate student receives preliminary acceptance into this program as a freshman, how would that process occur? Would we obtain all the information we need when they apply as freshmen and would we need the Graduate program involved at the time of their acceptance? The logistics need to be discussed.

Screening of applications for a higher level of competency of freshmen would occur to ensure they would be able to undergo the accelerated program. The program would also include transfer students, as well as those who may apply for it later on who did not know about the program at the time of admission or those who did not have the high grades as a freshman, that are required for acceptance into the program.

Director Rodney explained that he is familiar with blended programs. He suggested adding coordination with the Financial Aid Office and the Registrar Office. Financial aid is awarded differently for undergraduate and graduate students. The students' eligibility changes as they become graduate students. There are some logistics that need to be clearly stated in the proposal.

Professor Kurtz clarified that students must first obtain a B.S. degree. The only difference is when they begin their M.S. degree, they will be allowed to count their units a second time toward their M.S. degree that they have already completed as an Undergraduate. The student would not be both a Bachelor student and a Master student concurrently.

Action:

- Professor Kurtz will consult with Director Radney to include some text that will address financial aid.

- An AFAC member suggested adding a comment regarding clear expectations about tuition rates and financial aid, as they are likely to change.
- Senate Director Paul recommended approving a policy for these types of programs prior to engaging the Senate in reviewing the proposal.
- Senate Director Paul will contact Professor Kurtz to go over the review and approval process.

Chair Ghassemi emphasized that this is a preliminary discussion of the proposal and that no action from AFAC and the Senate is needed at this time. The proposal must go through a formal review process consistent with established processes.

Director Radney noted that if Professor Kurtz is thinking of freezing the tuition for the Graduate program, there are other units on campus that will also need to be involved.

Chair Ghassemi asked what kind of impact is anticipated regarding the number of undergraduate and graduate students this program will potentially add on? Is it possible for a non-engineering major to apply to this program? Professor Kurtz believes that the numbers will increase substantially if this is used as a marketing tool. Her main concern is the funding for the Master's degree part of the program. If students are not funded in this program, they will find other graduate programs. It is problematic that the Master's part of the program is not being funded and this issue should be addressed separately from this proposal.

The following comments/questions were proposed by committee members:

- Does Professor Kurtz have an estimate of how many students would meet the criteria for the program based on GPA?
She estimated hundreds of students.
- When stating that the GPA should be greater than 3.4, is it the cumulative GPA or does each year have to have a GPA higher than 3.4?

Due to time constraints, it was decided that these questions be addressed at a later time, once a policy is established and the proposal goes through the review process.

V. AFAC Resources – Chair Ghassemi – 5 min

Members are encouraged to read the following resources and contact Director Paul with questions.

- A. [Senate website](#)
- B. [AFAC website](#)
- C. [AFAC Box site](#)
- D. [Senate Policies and Procedures](#)
- E. [Divisional Bylaws and Regulations](#)
- F. [Principles to Guide the Practice of Executive Session](#)

If a member feels that an Executive Session should take place, they are asked to please contact the Senate Director and Chair Ghassemi.

- G. [Consultation guidelines](#)

Senate business must go through a formal process with documentation.

H. Distributing work on AFAC

All campus and systemwide review items will be posted on AFAC Box folder and on the Senate website, here: <https://senate.ucmerced.edu/review-items>. Review items will be assigned to one AFAC reviewer before each scheduled meeting.

VI. AFAC Goals and Priorities for AY 20-21– All -10 min

Members proposed and discussed goals for this academic year.

- Priorities that were proposed by Senate committee chairs this summer are available here: <https://ucmerced.box.com/s/g4gojzfb0xck7ciw6cj1efp3fr92lv4e>

During the September 4 DivCo meeting, Senate Committee Chairs were asked to provide their goals and priorities for the academic year.

One main item of concern for AFAC is Standardized Testing. This will be discussed at the systemwide level, as well as at UC Merced.

Director Paul shared the spreadsheet that she prepared this summer which includes AFAC and all Senate Committees' priorities. Committee members added the following items to the list:

1. Assessing student loans and borrowing-related outcomes for undergraduate students regarding their ability to repay their loans.
 - Director Radney suggested working with IRDS on acquiring data. We have a low default rate, and students borrow on average about \$20,000. With the low rate, it is apparent that students should be able to repay their loans.
One measure of concern is that while students are not defaulting, there is a high number of students who have not repaid at least \$1.00 of principle after five years. Only 69% of undergraduate students who have borrowed have repaid at least \$1.00 after five years. This could mean that they are using income-based repayment at a very high rate. It is a very complex issue. AFAC would like to assess the right self-help rate. Should repayment be varied by income level and background of our students?
 - The Department of Education has connected with third party servicers to collect on some on the loans. The students' loans are transferred, and the students are not always aware of this.
2. Implementing Admission by Exception.
3. Working to develop additional financial aid pipelines. This includes finding ways to acquire additional money rather than worrying about the money we already have.
 - The Financial Aid Office is working on increasing scholarships. Director Radney has spoken with the Chancellor about increasing scholarships, and this is UC Merced's greatest opportunity to reduce borrowing.
4. The largest source of aid is the Cal Grant Program. There are ongoing discussions in Sacramento for reforming it. UC Merced's voice in this process could potentially yield a lot

of return, especially for lower income students.

5. Increasing the number of transfer students. UC Merced is the third or fourth selective campus, depending on the year. It was suggested to review the requirements and the selection process to see if there has been any improvement.
- Governance Retreat Priorities:
<https://ucmerced.box.com/s/yagos92olswubqic9r5fugg7ewy5jn1u>

This is an informational item. Chair Ghassemi encouraged members to review on their own time.

VII. [Request from the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships](#) – Ron Radney – 5 min

Director Radney introduced a draft proposal to revise the rubric used for ranking potential Regents' Scholars recipients by eliminating the SAT/ACT. This revision was prompted by the UC Regents' vote in May 2020 to approve the suspension of the standardized test requirement (SAT/ACT).

Requested action: Members endorse the proposed revisions.

The Regents' Scholarship Program is offered across the UC system. The Admissions scoring rubric that is used to determine offers is reviewed by the Senate at each campus. UC Merced's rubric will be different from other campuses and includes several factors:

- The ACT/SAT accounts for 4% of the overall rubric scoring. The Regents voted to eliminate this as a factor, so UC Merced wants to eliminate it from the rubric.
- The proposed rubric eliminates the 4% from the ACT/SAT and adds it to the overall GPA, changing it from 80% to 84%.

Director Radney asked for the committee's approval, for implementation in AY 21-22.

A member asked if adding the 4% to areas other than the GPA had been considered. Director Radney explained other ways that the 4% could have been dispersed, and he is open to changing it based on members' thoughts.

A member asked what the rationale was for the allocation of different percentages. The non-academic percentages seem arbitrary. Director Rodney explained that the non-academic percentages have always been around 10% of the overall rubric, and academic percentages around 90%.

A staff member from Admissions mentioned that AP, IB, and college courses may not be available to all incoming applicants, so the UC should not put too much weight in that area. Based on the number of A-G courses, students should have the option to complete the minimum UC 30-unit requirement. It was suggested putting the extra weight in this area, if not toward the GPA.

Members unanimously endorsed the proposal, moving the 4% to the overall GPA.

Action: Director Paul will notify Director Radney via email/memo.

VIII. Requests from the Office of Admissions – Dustin Noji – 15 min

The items listed below are associated with the current systemwide admissions changes and audits.

Requested Action: Members discuss the Office of Undergraduate Admissions’ proposals and endorse the recommended revisions.

A. [First Year Selection Updates](#)

One priority for this year is making adjustments toward selection. Based off the May 21st vote by the Regents, the UC system is going to move toward test-optional for Fall 2021 and Fall 2022 and move to test-blind for Fall 2023 and Fall 2024, considering whether UC substitutes the ACT/SAT for their own test or decides to not use the test at all.

The UC is currently under some litigation, and a judge is not allowing any assessment or examinations used within admissions. The UC is in the process of forming a response. This causes confusion because students and their families are not sure if the UC is test-blind or test-optional.

This proposal is asking that, as a campus, for the purpose of selection, UC Merced become test-blind starting in Fall 2021. We would continue to use tests for students to meet A-G deficiencies and A-G courses. This is important because it helps avoid confusion for prospective students when applying to multiple campuses.

UC Merced’s disenrollment targets are high and with the current market, it is likely that we will need to admit all minimally eligible students. Therefore, this selection policy will give us the next 2-3 years to test it against the current market and see how it would unfold. It would not go into effect until we become more selective or receive more applications.

The SAT score is a lower predictor of four-year graduate rates than high school GPA. To add more value, outdated API scores are being replaced with the College Board Landscape Score.

There are two proposals under consideration:

- 1) Remove SAT scores from current selection criteria:
 - a. Selection would remain unchanged with the exception of the removal of the SAT scores. It would shift the selection from 75% to 69% but also increase the weight of a student’s GPA from 45% to 46.61%. This would be easier to implement while acknowledging that BOARS would like UC Merced to move to a holistic review process in the future.
 - b. Admissions Director Noji shared and discussed Appendix A.
- 2) Remove SAT scores from current selection criteria and add GPA comparisons:
 - a. GPA comparisons would take the average admitted student GPA for last year’s class and the admitted student GPA from high schools. Students’ performance

would be compared against both of those GPAs and points would be awarded to those above the GPA averages. This would provide more context for students' achievement as well as contributing to reducing the effects of grade inflation.

- b. Admissions Director Noji shared and discussed Appendix B.

An AFAC member asked if the subparts of a student's GPA had been considered, for example, only English scores. It was explained that our current system is not set up in a way that enables Admissions Office to look at subparts of GPA, but that this could be considered in the future.

Actions:

- Director Paul will invite comments from the School Executive Committee Chairs on behalf of AFAC. The Schools' feedback will be shared with AFAC.
- It was recommended that the Office of Admissions consult with Department Chairs.

B. [Admissions by Exception \(A by E\)](#)

Requested Action: Members endorse the proposed revisions.

The proposal offers

- a change in UC Merced's process for Admission by Exception
- updates to the current reference to SAT/ACT
- updated policy language
- removal of some errors that were in the previous policy.

The changes are necessary due to the statewide and internal systemwide audit.

Under the current process, the Office of Admissions reader identifies students for Admission by Exception and sends the applications to the Director of Admissions, who then reviews them and makes a decision. Based on the statewide audit, it has been recommended that these decisions be made by a committee. Under the BOARS guidelines, it is asked that a committee be formed, consisting of a faculty member, the Director of Admissions, and the Associate Director of Admissions. All decisions by the committee must be unanimous in order to admit a student under A by E.

It would be a significant workload on the committee. Last year, approximately 600 applications were reviewed. Because a high number of those cases were from non-resident students, it is estimated that the number could drop to 350-400 applications this year.

This could be implemented as part of our reader process that occurs in December, so the committee would need to be formed by at least November. The committee can consist of more than one senate faculty member, and there would be training involved. If there are three AFAC members, the review would still consist of approximately 100 applications each, which is estimated to take about a week to review.

Actions:

- Director Noji will provide Director Paul with the BOARS guidelines.

- Director Paul will solicit feedback from the School Executive Committee Chairs, giving them a deadline of about three weeks. She will share the associated PowerPoint slides with the School as contextual information. It was suggested to ask the Schools if they have any concerns with an AFAC member being assigned the review of applications for students who are applying to a program external to the AFAC reviewer's school.

C. Discussion/informational item: [Athletics MOU](#)

Members to send any questions to Director Paul and Chair Ghassemi.

IX. [Request for Review of Admissions Materials](#) – 10 min

The office of marketing and communications for enrollment management has invited AFAC to review draft publications for admissions. The School Executive Committees have also been invited to review these materials. Their comments will be shared with AFAC.

Requested Action: Review content of materials and propose edits, as relevant.

Deadline for Comments: September 18, 2020.

Action: Director Paul will share feedback from the School Executive Committees once she receives comments from the SSHA Executive Committee. (Completed 9/14)

X. Systemwide Review Items – 10 min

A. UCEP's Proposed Revisions to [systemwide Senate Regulation 630](#) (Requirements for the Bachelor's Degree).

The revisions aim to address confusion surrounding interpretation of 630.A and 630.D, particularly as it pertains to systemwide courses. Please refer to the memos available [here](#) for background and context.

AFAC is a lead reviewer.

Action Requested: Identify a lead reviewer. The lead reviewer comments will be sent to Chair Ghassemi and to Fatima Paul. All AFAC members will be invited to review a draft memo to the Senate Chair.

Vice Chair Menke volunteered to lead the review of this item. (Update: a memo has been sent to the Senate Chair on 9/18/20 – completed)

B. Proposed revisions to [systemwide Senate Regulation 544](#) (Registration).

The revisions are intended to facilitate UC students' access to courses offered on other UC campuses by clarifying certain aspects of the cross-campus course enrollment process. A summary of the proposed revisions and the rationale are available [here](#).

AFAC is a lead reviewer.

Action Requested: Identify a lead reviewer. The lead reviewer comments will be sent to Chair Ghassemi and to Fatima Paul. All AFAC members will be invited to review a draft memo to the Senate Chair

DivCo's Deadline for comments: October 6, 2020.

Action: Member Eaton will review the proposed revisions to the systemwide Senate Regulations 544 and provide any comments to the committee by September 30, 2020.