

Division Council (DIVCO) statement on the suspension of a student-facilitated course
September 20, 2016

The Berkeley Divisional Council (DIVCO) is deeply concerned about the Administration's recent effort to suspend a course, an action at odds with mandated procedure and one that raises serious questions about academic freedom.

As delegated by Regents Standing Order 105.2, the Academic Senate has the authority to authorize and supervise courses and curricula. This responsibility is one of the cornerstones of shared governance, and is inextricably linked to fostering and promoting the academic freedom of both faculty and students. The responsibility for curricular oversight is carried out at Berkeley by the Division's Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI).

COCI's review and approval process is predicated on the notion that "the faculty as a whole has the responsibility of ensuring that courses are conducted fairly and effectively, that University rubrics like credit units and breadth requirements are treated consistently, that requests for exceptions and variances are evaluated fairly, and so on." At the same time, COCI acknowledges that "academic units represent professional bodies in their disciplines, and as such are uniquely suited to decide on the appropriateness of specific topics and approaches. Questions of appropriate depth and breadth, necessary prerequisite training and knowledge, and appropriate standards of evaluation all belong to these units." These principles form the foundation of our course review and approval process.

The events of September 13, 2016, in which a student-facilitated, DeCal course, "Palestine: A Settler Colonial Analysis," was suspended by the campus administration undermine the Senate's authority over courses and curricula, and abrogates shared governance on our campus. The course proposal was reviewed and considered according to posted procedures, which include three levels of oversight. The student-facilitator adhered to University policy at all stages of the process. Concerns were never raised at any stage, and the course went into effect at the start of the fall 2016 semester uneventfully. The administration's attempts to suspend the course reflect a disturbing lack of transparency and disregard for the fundamental principles that underlie the faculty's curricular oversight.

Accordingly, the Divisional Council reasserts the Senate's delegated authority, and calls on campus administration to respect and adhere to established procedures and processes for the review and approval of courses and curricula. We reject the notion of decanal authority to approve or suspend courses. That authority is vested in the faculty.

DIVCO is also deeply concerned about the negative effect these events have had on the student-facilitator of the course, and the chilling effect these actions may have on prospective student-facilitators. While we appreciate that the course has now been reinstated, this is not sufficient. One of our students has been publicly blamed for not

following proper procedures. This is contrary to all that we stand for as educators, and represents a serious violation of the student's academic freedom and of our values as an academic community. We therefore call on campus administration to publicly retract the false accusation that the student facilitator did not comply with policies and procedures that govern the normal academic review and apologize to the student-facilitator.

In closing, we note that COCI is undertaking a comprehensive review of this incident, and will report back to DIVCO in the near future.