

# Report of the UCB DIVCO Task Force on Online and Remote Instruction Post-COVID

## Introduction

The UC Berkeley Divisional Council Task Force on *Online and Remote Instruction Post COVID-19*, met six times during Spring 2021.

The task force organized our thinking around the perspective that our number one priority is building on the campus' and the wider educational community's experiences over the last 18 months to improve pedagogy. We believe that in-person activities help to build the trust and casual connections and conversations that are required for a community of engaged scholars. We believe that continued, appropriate use of remote learning tools and other digital technologies to supplement and enrich rather than to replace on-campus instruction can be a benefit to instructors and students alike. We continue to believe in the primacy of excellent pedagogy which can take advantage of hybrid formats, remote instruction, in-person instruction, and the range of available digital tools. We also recognize that continued use of online tools will ease the strain of periods of emergency remote teaching such as will inevitably occur as a result of wildfires, potential pandemic "surges," or other disasters. We recognize further that as digital technologies, online platforms, and applications continue to evolve, our pedagogies will need to evolve in tandem when pedagogical advantages accrue.

We sought to identify useful lessons from this period where the pandemic forced us into remote teaching and offer suggestions for building on them in new ways in the coming years when the use of remote and online tools will be optional to instructors. We recognize our bias; willingness to serve on this task force came with a predisposition to thinking that there are numerous positives to take away from our recent experience of remote teaching. Every committee member reported learning something that would inform their future teaching. We also recognize that some colleagues would be ecstatic never to teach by *Zoom* videoconference again and that many are joyfully looking forward to an in-person fall semester.

With this in mind, we make recommendations for short-term investments that

- 1) support the professional development and ongoing engagement of the coalition of interested and willing faculty with tools of remote learning.
- 2) help those on the fence about remote pedagogy to be more aware of how they might use some of the varied online tools to improve their teaching, and

for longer term efforts to

- 3) encourage strategic thinking about how UC Berkeley faculty use remote learning tools, how we learn about and communicate best practices for remote teaching to each other, and how we establish ongoing methods to evaluate the efficacy of learning that involves remote tools, courses, and curricula.

We reiterate that our recommendations are framed around improved pedagogy as the driving force for our choices—whether at the scale of an individual course or a sequence of courses that constitutes a program. It is our view that the best way to infuse remote learning throughout the campus will be the informal leadership of engaged, experienced educators who provide models and strategies for effective teaching.

We recognize that there are other motivations for increased investment in online learning, including educating a larger community of students and adding revenue by enrolling students beyond what the

physical campus can manage. Knowing we had a short window, our committee did not engage in a thorough discussion of these issues. They are important. We recommend they be addressed with specificity by the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils during the review of individual online degree proposals as they are submitted. In addition, we recommend Divisional Council and other Academic Senate committees (e.g. COR, COCI, COT, etc.) remain attentive to issues that go beyond individual courses, programs, and degrees. Examples of issues we have in mind include the following:

- A. improving teaching across campus;
- B. awareness of and attention to incremental increases in the demands on faculty time for their teaching that are each individually well meaning and support student learning but, in aggregate, substantially affect the faculty's capacity to focus appropriate effort on research and creative projects;
- C. ensuring that aspects of the UC Berkeley education that make a degree more than the sum of the individual courses a student takes are and remain a key element of every degree offered; and
- D. assuring that any increase in online education does not tilt campus hiring priorities toward adjunct teaching positions at the cost of investing in new tenure-track and SOE-track faculty lines.

### **Context**

Some faculty did amazing things with their teaching in the last year. There were about 500 nominations for the COT award named "Extraordinary Teaching in Extraordinary Times." Originally 25 awards, the Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education (VCUE) generously agreed to fund 50. The excellence took many different forms as described in this announcement [Extraordinary Teaching in Extraordinary Times Award | Research, Teaching, and Learning](#) and in COT Chair Glynda Hull's eloquent presentation of the awards at the April 29, 2021 Division meeting.

Research, Teaching and Learning (RTL) provides ongoing support for teaching on campus. During the pandemic, RTL collated and organized many new resources on the webpage [Keep Teaching | Research, Teaching, and Learning](#). RTL greatly expanded the number of classrooms equipped with technologies for capturing and sharing audio and slides.

We want to emphasize that while lessons from emergency remote pedagogy can provide some guidance for the future, we understand that emergency remote teaching and deliberate online education are not the same. Indeed, the opportunity to be more selective about the use of remote learning tools and, therefore, to create courses that use a mixture of in-person and remote experiences at the discretion of the instructor, allows faculty to make pedagogical choices and construct learning experiences that were not possible during the pandemic.

As an example, in an otherwise fully in-person class in the future, faculty may choose to continue the pandemic practice—reported by quite a few faculty—of including experts from around the world in their courses. When we were all forced to be physically remote, then remoteness was no longer considered a barrier to inviting distant colleagues to contribute to Berkeley classes. We think this mind-shift will persist and expand the opportunities and perspectives we can offer our students in future in-person classes. (We note, however, that such visits should continue to be supported with paid honoraria, in cases where that is the tradition.)

We also note that fully remote learning during the pandemic presented challenges—including high levels of stress and anxiety—for students. On the one hand, since March 2020, students have reported high

levels of stress due to remote learning and have asked for much more flexibility around deadlines, grading policies, etc. On the other hand, many students have appreciated and expressed the desire to maintain some of the features widely available this past year that aided their education—for example, they appreciate that recorded lectures allow flexibility in how, when, and where a student views material. At the same time, asking faculty to record lectures, hold online office hours, and otherwise engage in “hybrid teaching” can substantially add to faculty stress and burnout, as campus surveys have testified to this year.

### **Short/near term opportunities and tactics**

Improved teaching and learning can be a positive outcome of the pandemic. Relatively modest investments by the University and faculty might generate important benefits.

- 1) There is much to communicate by way of **lessons learned about use of remote technologies as a component of pedagogy**. The *Extraordinary Teaching in Extraordinary Times* awards are one means of communicating best practices. We should look for others and attempt to elevate instructor knowledge about the range of tools available and ideas for using them effectively. Similarly, we strongly encourage visits from RTL/CTL staff to department meetings for brief introductions—sharing an idea about best practice and ensuring faculty have a face to go with the names on the Keep Teaching webpage. We also support adding a module about remote pedagogy to GSI training and/or GSI pedagogy courses.
- 2) **A strategy for evaluating pedagogical effectiveness of new modalities** should be developed. Multiple different approaches to evaluation are needed, as is the case for all evaluations of pedagogical effectiveness. As an example, RTL’s Data Analytics group and the Berkeley Online Advising program are already using data on teaching modalities and student performance from bCourses to help students and instructors improve their performance. This program could be expanded to broaden our understanding of the effectiveness of remote learning strategies. Another suggestion is to establish focus groups and/or a committee of students and faculty to (1) discuss the broad range of pedagogical innovation that took place over the last year and a half, (2) develop a list of lessons learned and promising strategies going forward, and (3) to continue to report on adoption of new methods and technologies in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022. Finally, there may be some benefit to surveying students and faculty in the Summer of 2021—with more than a year of remote learning fresh in their minds—about what they want next for Berkeley education, and the role that remote tools should play going forward.
- 3) Our committee felt and recognized the **tension between two strongly held values around recorded course materials**. First, we recognized that many faculty would like to continue teaching with Course Capture (slides and audio recorded), and some faculty would like to have full video capture of their courses. For these faculty, investing in an adequate supply of well-equipped classrooms for Course Capture is important, and enhanced availability of training for instructors and GSIs with simple, modern video and video editing equipment and other options for video recording of classrooms is desirable. At the same time, we recognized that some instructors feel that peer-to-peer learning is a crucial element of their pedagogy and that asynchronous access to material outside of the scheduled time inevitably harms live interactive learning. Related to the broader tension around the benefits and drawbacks of recorded material, we also recognize that there are additional concerns in the evolution of new norms that increase faculty workload. If a large number of classes are recorded that will inevitably create an

expectation—no matter the individual faculty’s desired pedagogy—that there will be videos of all classes and that faculty will manage videos as part of all their work.

We note that RTL’s budget request makes a significant commitment to increasing the number of classrooms with Course Capture and video capability. We support this as a high priority. We recommend that the CAPRA and COT review classroom technologies next year and assess whether the supply is adequate to support faculty interest.

- 4) **Academic integrity** stands out as a major concern for students and faculty operating in exclusively remote pedagogies (campus-developed [recommendations regarding remote proctoring](#) over the past year). In person proctoring—even in remote locations—will become possible again. We recommend that the campus return to the practice of conducting timed, proctored exams in person (even for online courses), while also maintaining the viability of unproctored take-home exams for faculty who determine that to be a preferred method of assessment for their classes. Other potential strategies include rotating question banks and cheating detection algorithms. We note as well that some of these approaches have become an “arms race” where students learn how dishonesty detection methods work and then invent new ways around detection; therefore, as we move forward, we should be mindful of what assessment practices enhance learning and what practices create additional problems. This also has the potential to claim inordinate amounts of faculty time.

#### **Strategic questions that require additional planning/thinking and ongoing conversation**

- 1) Beginning in March 2019, a large number of committees were set up to support planning for emergency teaching. We recommend these be sunset as we return to in-person operations. However, it is not yet clear if the standard Academic Senate and administrative committees are adequately aligned to our new reality in which much more creative energy is being devoted to remote and online instruction. In this context, we are concerned that the potential impacts of online education on labor equity on campus may not fall squarely in the domain of any existing committees. We recommend reevaluation of the larger question of our organized response to managing, governing and leading the development of online pedagogies (including labor issues) at the end of Fall 2021. This will allow for a semester where we attempt to operate from the ordinary set of senate and administrative structures for engaging on these topics.
- 2) We are aware that a number of Deans are considering significant expansion of online programs, some internally managed and some through strategic arrangements with external vendors. We recommend the campus develop a strategy guiding our relationships with vendors for online courses and degrees and/or guiding our internal investment in development and support of tools and marketing for development of online and remote courses. A coordinated approach would protect faculty and university intellectual property, ensure that we maximize the return on university investments in people and technology and bring appropriate scrutiny to financial arrangements.
- 3) Many students do not pursue education abroad or internships in locations far from campus because doing so would require them to find a replacement for a particular course in the sequence leading to completion of a major. Our students would benefit greatly from such off-campus opportunities, and remote courses may offer a way to mitigate the current challenges to off-campus experiences. We encourage departments to consider whether it would be possible to

create a small subset of courses in their program that can be offered to students remotely and to assess whether doing so would result in adoption by their majors of opportunities for internships and education abroad without increasing their time to degree. We ask that the Senate Chair take appropriate opportunities to ask Deans and Chairs to think about this issue for their students and curricula.

- 4) Initial reports on the “Semester in the Cloud” are that faculty and students felt the education was excellent. Fully online courses allow students access to what the Chancellor has labeled “elasticity of place.” However, some existing courses will not be renewed (for reasons such as the instructor leaving campus), and some faculty would like the opportunity to create new courses. Additional courses could increase the breadth of opportunities for entering students and continuing students (such as education abroad). In addition to the broader investments outlined above that apply to all teaching, we recommend continued investment in maintenance of existing and expansion of our portfolio of online classes primarily taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty, SOE or PSOE teaching faculty, or long-term lecturers deeply connected to their departments.
- 5) There are additional important issues that this committee recognizes need significant study as we move forward, but that we did not have time to thoroughly examine. These include strategies for best supporting access for disabled students, and establishing guidelines for faculty and GSI workload equity in online and in-person courses, (e.g. many GSIs report that being effective in their jobs took more time with remote learning than in normal years).

### **Concluding thoughts**

Finally, throughout our meetings, we found ourselves in a wide-ranging conversation about teaching and learning: which aspects of courses should be in-person and which remote? Who gets to decide? According to what values should faculty, programs, and campus make these decisions?

For example, we heard strong arguments in favor of offering office hours, tutoring, and advising in both remote and in-person modalities as different people (or the same people in different moments) will be better served by one or the other. We heard more mixed views about seminars, colloquia, and the national or international meetings that constitute key aspects of our graduate education and serve as the intellectual glue that hold departments and other communities of scholars together. Some of us felt the most important aspects of those events are the in-person conversation over food and drinks before and after a talk. For most of us, that just doesn’t happen on Zoom. Others felt the ability to have scholars from across the globe engage together brought new energy to campus intellectual life that cannot always happen if dependent on people having to travel to be in-person. (This is to say nothing of the environmental costs of air travel, which outweigh even the energy consumption of dozens of people on *Zoom*.)

These are just some of the many parts of an ongoing conversation about post-pandemic pedagogy. As noted above, we strongly encourage campus to think strategically about the lessons emerging from remote emergency teaching and learning, and we recommend centering effective pedagogical practices—as varied as they may be across campus—as discussions continue. We hope this report is useful to the Academic Senate and Administration as they consider investments of time and financial resources around remote and online learning, and we thank the campus for the opportunity to serve on this task force.

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on behalf of

**Faculty participants in the Task Force**

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**In addition to the faculty above, our conversations were informed by contributions of expert guests including:**

VCUE Cathy Koshland  
Shawna Dark (RTL)  
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