

Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of January 19, 2023

UPDATE ON SYSTEMWIDE DISABILITIES WORKGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a follow-up to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee's January 19, 2022 discussion item, *Update on Supporting Students with Disabilities at the University of California*. Part of that discussion focused on a new vision for inclusion, one centered on the experiences of students with disabilities. The two co-chairs of the recently appointed Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities shared the charge of the workgroup and its intention to address many of the issues raised in the discussion item, ones that deeply affected students' sense of belonging and academic success. The Regents asked for a midpoint update on the progress of the workgroup and requested that they bring any items of immediate focus to the committee's awareness.

This update addresses the workgroup's charge, progress to date, items that inform the workgroup's focus and, ultimately, the final set of recommendations due December 2023.

BACKGROUND

The population of students with disabilities at UC has risen steadily in recent years. Data from 2019–20 and 2020–21 show that approximately seven percent of UC's undergraduate and graduate student population receive accommodations from campus Disabled Student Services (DSS) offices. Undergraduate and graduate/professional students with disabilities report lower levels of satisfaction and belonging at UC than students without disabilities. Accessibility in the classroom and maneuvering through the physical infrastructure of the campuses remain challenging for many students with disabilities.

WORKGROUP ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

To address the needs and concerns of students with disabilities, the University established the Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities (SDWG) in December 2021. The charge of the workgroup is to assist UC leadership in determining how to better support students with disabilities through a new framework for inclusion. Specifically, the charge of the workgroup is to:

- Review existing systemwide policies and practices related to:
 - Academic accommodations for students with disabilities including assistive technologies.
 - Physical accommodations for students with disabilities, including on-campus housing, classrooms, laboratories, other facilities.
 - Universal design as a tool to increase accessibility and expand inclusion in campus life experiences.
- Analyze existing data sources and, if necessary, recommend new collection of data, to facilitate a deeper understanding of the needs and experiences of students with disabilities.
- Ensure that analyses are inclusive of intersecting identities and that they address students' sense of belonging.
- Make recommendations to campus and systemwide leaders on policy changes and/or programmatic improvements that better support students with disabilities.

The workgroup comprises UC students, faculty, and staff. Student representatives include undergraduate and graduate students familiar with the experience of being a disabled student. Staff representatives include Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance directors, academic advisors, residential staff, diversity and equity professionals, legal counsel, and disabled-student services directors. Faculty members were selected by the UC Academic Council and have extensive knowledge of supporting students with disabilities and/or the disability rights landscape.

PROGRESS TO DATE

The SDWG meets bimonthly. At the time of this meeting, the Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities (SDWG) has met seven times virtually. Meetings have focused on a range of topics, all centered on the student experience. After reviewing several student-issued reports and hearing from its members, the workgroup organized itself into three subcommittees that represent the major themes informing the student experience. They are academic culture, campus culture, and infrastructure. The subcommittees overlap and at times intersect with one another, but for purposes of addressing each area individually, the subcommittees took on the goal of studying the issues and providing recommendations on these topics. A brief description of each subcommittee and the focus of its area is as follows:

- **Academic culture goal:** To ensure that curriculum design, and the overall attitude and approach of faculty, adequately meet the needs of students with disabilities. Specific items to address include the in-classroom experience of students with disabilities, assessment of the time it takes to request and receive an accommodation, accessibility to online learning and other tools for assistive learning, and the cultural competency of instructors/teaching staff towards people with disabilities.
- **Campus culture goal:** To develop and expand a greater definition of diversity, equity, and inclusion that recognizes and includes the values and needs of students with disabilities at the University of California. Ensure that persons with disabilities feel

welcome and included at UC and that the University provides them with an environment where they can thrive to their maximum potential. Specific items to be addressed are the sense of belonging and climate at the University; cultural competency training for students, faculty, and staff; and accessibility to campus activities and co-curricular opportunities. Focus also includes greater outreach and visibility of disability services and culture at the University.

- **Infrastructure goal:** To work proactively on making all campuses as physically and technologically accessible as possible for people with all kinds of disabilities and to make the University known as a welcoming environment, through its accessibility. Specific items to address include reviewing policies impacting accessibility and ensuring that they are current and being practiced, including but not limited to emergency evacuation operations, housing, wayfinding—that is, information regarding accessible parking, entrances to buildings and elevators—and websites that are accessible.

Workgroup meetings have included discussions with UC Student Association (UCSA) and UC Graduate and Professional Council (UCGPC) representatives, students with disabilities, and disability services coordinators. The co-chairs have each met with the Provost and the Council of Undergraduate Deans, and they are slated to meet with Academic Council leadership. Future meetings of the workgroup will include representatives from capital planning, housing, and graduate studies.

ELEVATED ITEMS

The following areas of focus have been discussed and agreed upon by the Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities (SDWG). These points are being elevated for the purpose of the midpoint check-in. This update does not preclude the inclusion of additional content areas or recommendations in the final report. These items also may be further refined in the final report.

- Sufficiently increase staffing at offices for students with disabilities so they can offer students an appointment within 2–4 business days of first contact.
- Require training for faculty, staff, and leadership on addressing and serving students with disabilities to ensure effective service of students with disabilities and to move toward UC’s goal of disability inclusion.
- Require all campuses to have a full-time ADA Coordinator focused exclusively on disability compliance issues, consultation, and education.
- Develop and appropriately staff disability cultural/resource centers for students on each campus.
- Establish on each campus a disability task force appointed by the chancellor and co-chaired by a senior faculty member and a senior administrator. The task force will engage in an ongoing dialogue on disability inclusion and other issues concerning students with disabilities and will be tasked with developing actionable recommendations.
- Develop a systemwide community of practice by convening the chairs of the campus disability task forces semiannually, to share best practices and challenges and to ensure accountability.

- Ensure that disabled students can physically access the campus, including paths, buildings, and classrooms, and can safely evacuate in a crisis or emergency.

NEXT STEPS

The workgroup will continue to meet through academic year 2022–23 and will begin writing its final report in summer 2023 for release in late fall 2023. Data collection and analysis will continue, as well as seeking input from various subject-matter experts. An in-person meeting is scheduled for January 2023 at UC Berkeley, the birthplace of the disability rights movement of the 1960s and '70s. The meeting will include visiting the newly established Disability Cultural Center and hearing from students, faculty, and staff who contributed to its establishment.

CONCLUSION

To uphold its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, the University of California remains steadfast in providing a student experience that recognizes the unique needs of students with disabilities. The final report from the Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities will serve as a guide for explicit actions targeted at improving the experience of students with disabilities at the University.

KEY TO ACRONYMS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
SDWG	Systemwide Advisory Workgroup on Students with Disabilities (Shortened: Students with Disabilities Workgroup)
UCSA	University of California Student Association
UCGPC	University of California Graduate and Professional Council (students)