Recommendation from *ad hoc* Cross-College Committee on Conversion

**Committee Structure:** The *ad hoc* Cross-College Committee was formed in late February 2006, to achieve consensus on a strategy for addressing the campuswide conversion ratio problem. The immediate catalyst was the proposal to increase some courses in CHASS from 4 to 5 units, which was tabled for further discussion at the Winter Divisional meeting of the UCR Senate. The committee was established as a mechanism for communication across college boundaries, with the goal of providing a recommendation to the Senate for consideration at the Spring Divisional Meeting. The membership of the committee included:

- Gary Scott, Associate Dean, CNAS
- Rick Redak, Chair of the Executive Committee, CNAS
- Dave Fairris, Associate Dean, CHASS
- Rene Lysloff, Chair of the Executive Committee, CHASS
- Chinya Ravishankar, Associate Dean, BCOE
- Teodor Przymusinski, Chair of the Executive Committee, BCOE
- George Haggerty, Chair, Committee on Courses and Member, Committee on Education Policy (CEP Liaison)
- Andrew Grosovsky, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Programs

The committee’s work was supported by three senior staff members who worked closely with the membership in all aspects of committee activity:

- Patsy Oppenheim, Academic Program Coordinator, Office of the Vice Provost
- Junelyn Peeples, Director of Undergraduate Academic Program Research, Office of the Vice Provost
- Bryce Mason, Research Analyst, Office of the EVC and Provost

1. **Background on the Conversion Ratio and its Significance for Student Success**

   a. **Definitions and Data:** Enrollment at the University can be considered in two different ways: headcount and full time equivalent (FTE). Headcount enrollment consists of all students currently registered. FTE enrollment is calculated by the total number of units that our students earn in an academic year divided by 45. The “conversion ratio” is simply FTE enrollment divided by headcount enrollment. The campus receives state support based on our FTE enrollment, not on our headcount enrollment. FTE enrollment is used to determine such items as faculty lines and capital construction needs. Under federal rules, students are considered full time for purposes of financial aid by maintaining an enrollment of at least 12 units in each academic quarter, which is sometimes confused with full time equivalent. In the University of California system, students fully occupy an FTE by maintaining an enrollment of at least 15 units per quarter, which keeps them on track for graduation in the normative four-year period.

   UCR has the lowest conversion ratio in the UC System. Table 1 compares the average number of student credit hours taken each quarter by undergraduates at UCR and other campuses. A comparison of conversion ratios by campus for Academic Year 2004-05 is shown in Table 2. A breakdown of UCR conversion ratios by College for the last 3 academic years is shown in Table 3.

   b. **The UCLA Experience:** About 10 years ago, the UCLA campus conversion ratio was similar to the current UCR circumstance. Since that time they have undergone dramatic
improvement, and a panel of UCLA faculty and administrators visited UCR on March 12, 2006 to discuss their experience with conversion, curriculum reform, and student success. Some of the data that they distributed at that time is appended here. Figure 1 shows the timeframe for increase in conversion ratio at UCLA. Table 4 demonstrates that graduation rate and time to graduation corresponded to the improvement in conversion ratio. UCLA experienced an increase in 4-year graduation rates from 40% to 65% during this time period. The 6-year graduation rate exhibited a smaller but notable increase from 80% to 88%. These graduation rates are shown in historical context, and in comparison with other UC campuses, including UCR, in Table 5.

A key initial goal of UCLA in undertaking this effort to improve their conversion ratio was in managing enrollment growth. They were asked to grow by 4,000 FTE to meet systemwide growth needs, even though they felt that would lead to over-congestion. As it worked out, by improving their conversion ratio they met their enrollment growth objective by a headcount increase of only 2,000 students. Importantly, the academic qualifications of their entering students has also been steadily improving during this period since UCLA was able to maintain its admissions standards under comprehensive review, rather than relaxing them to meet enrollment pressures.

Much of the improvement in conversion ratio was achieved by re-uniting courses used for General Education. Eventually, this led to a re-structuring of General Education, which was a major campus focus during their last WASC reaccreditation review cycle. The UCLA faculty came to the conclusion that the 5 unit structure is much better for Lower Division students. It assures that students take 15 units, whereas the previous culture was that 12 units was acceptable. The 5 unit structure allows each course to get into a little more depth. Since students take 3 courses in a full 15 unit load, it makes it easier for them to adjust to university level study, and the pace of instruction in a quarter system.

One important tool in improving the conversion ratio at UCLA was a new Expected Cumulative Progress (ECP) policy. The Cross-College committee has prepared a draft UCR regulation (see below), which we believe will help keep students on track for 4 year graduation.

c. Ramifications of Conversion Ratio Improvement for Student Success and for Faculty:
Resolving the conversion ratio issue means that headcount enrollment would be reduced to a level that corresponds to the student FTE enrollment for which we receive budgetary support. This would reduce the number of students having trouble getting into popular, over-enrolled classes, and lessen the difficulty for faculty in dealing with over-enrollment. It would also lessen overload for advisors and for all other student services. By increasing our retention rates and the number of students graduating within the normative 4-year graduation time, we would improve UCR's reputational ranking. We can also anticipate an improvement in 6-year graduation rates, as was the case at UCLA. An improved conversion ratio would also significantly enable the implementation of selective admission through our comprehensive review process. The increased opportunity for selectivity in admissions would further contribute to improved institutional reputation. Selective admissions would likely result in an entering class profile with better academic preparation. We would thus have less need to offer preparatory classes in writing and math. Improved reputational ranking could also facilitate our ability to attract new faculty to UCR.
2. Overview of Committee Recommendations: The committee recognized that a multi-dimensional approach would be the most effective and appropriate way to address the conversion issue. Perhaps the most important aspect of this approach is the need for General Education reform, starting with modernization and added flexibility in the breadth requirement. This would allow Colleges to develop strategies for breadth and conversion that serve their students best, rather than having a “one size fits all” campus plan. Our recommendations for multidimensional action are outlined below in five categories. College-level plans for utilization of these various approaches is described in Section 3.

a. Increase of Unit Assignment for Selected Courses: The CHASS proposal to increase the unit value of some courses from 4 to 5 units was the issue that prompted the formation of the Cross-College Committee, and it was the most difficult issue for the committee to reach agreement. However, we quickly established consensus on two principles:

i. We should respect the recommendation of the CHASS faculty regarding the unit value for these courses. These changes have been carefully vetted by faculty in the various departments as well as by Committee on Courses. These groups feel that the proposed changes are justified on the basis of pedagogical and workload considerations, and that students in these courses should receive appropriate credit.

ii. We should ensure that all UCR students have an appropriate number of courses from which to choose in order to satisfy their breadth requirements. This has been an issue of significant concern to faculty in BCOE, and also of some concern in CNAS.

CHASS currently has a list of 38 existing courses recommended for unit revaluation, 7 new courses and 1 restored course proposed to carry 5 units (Table 6). Of these courses, 15 are approved for satisfaction of breadth requirements for BCOE students, and 17 are approved for satisfaction of breadth requirements for CNAS students (Table 6).

Overall, BCOE has a list of 98 courses approved for satisfaction of breadth requirements. The 15 courses proposed by CHASS for unit increase represent approximately 15% of this list (Table 7), and approximately 19% of BCOE student enrollment in breadth courses; an additional 5 BCOE breadth courses have prerequisites recommended for a unit increase. CNAS has a much larger list, 209 courses, approved for satisfaction of breadth requirements, of which 17 have been proposed by CHASS for unit increase (Table 7). These 17 courses represent approximately 8% of courses available to CNAS students for satisfaction of breadth requirements, and account for approximately 18% of CNAS student enrollment in breadth courses. Committee on Courses has further worked to broaden options for all students by arranging with Departments to hold five courses at 4 units. These include offerings in Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology (not all of these are currently approved for satisfaction of breadth requirements in BCOE). These efforts, together with the large number of breadth courses that remain unchanged in unit value, suggest that students in BCOE and CNAS will retain a variety of options for satisfaction of breadth requirements, even if they completely avoid courses that have increased from 4 to 5 units. However, there
are still concerns in BCOE that the breadth course choices for their students will be too constrained. Certain breadth subject areas, such as Economics, would be particularly less accessible for BCOE students due to the large number of courses in that discipline recommended for unit increase. BCOE members of the committee have also expressed reservations about the curricular justification for the proposed unit increases. They recommend a moratorium until such time as a proper mechanism is adopted for consideration of breadth course changes.

The effect of these proposed unit changes are further addressed in the lower portion of Table 7, which shows the enrollment by College in the CHASS courses proposed for unit increase. A total of 238 student FTE would be gained based on 2005-06 enrollments; of which 205 (86%) of these FTE would be from CHASS students (Table 7). The 8 FTE (3%) from BCOE students (Table 7) may not be realized if BCOE students avoid these courses after the unit increase. It should also be mentioned that a unit increase for CHEM 1A/1B/1C has also been proposed by the CNAS faculty, through creation of an associated 1-unit discussion section. If approved, this change would advance student success by providing small group discussion to accompany these large lecture classes, and create approximately 75 additional student FTE. However, BCOE faculty have expressed reservations about the CHEM 1A/1B/1C unit increase, though they have agreed to an increase on an interim basis for the 2006-07 academic year. If BCOE students did not enroll for the additional unit in CHEM 1A/1B/1C, this would reduce the anticipated 75 student FTE gain by 10%.

A summary of the overall impact of these proposed changes on the campus conversion ratio is presented in Table 8. In Academic Year 2005-06 UCR had a "conversion gap" of 946 (Table 8). Based on 2005-06 enrollment figures, an increase of 1 unit in the proposed set of CHASS courses would generate an additional 238 undergraduate FTE. This represents approximately 25% of the conversion gap (238/946) and would decrease the conversion gap to 708. Our conversion ratio would increase from 0.932 to 0.949. These figures do not include the anticipated contribution from the CHEM 1 series, which would further reduce the conversion gap to approximately 630, and further increase the conversion ratio to 0.954.

b. Expected Progress Regulation: In February the CNAS Executive Committee recommended that the Divisional Academic Senate review several of the UC campuses’ minimum acceptable progress policies and propose the Campus draft and adopt such a policy. Minimal acceptable progress or Expected Progress (the title of choice by the Committee) is defined as “the average annual unit load that a student should carry such that, over the course of 12 to 14 quarters, a student can reasonably expect to graduate,” (R. Redak memo to Senate, 2/23/06.) In the same memo, Professor Redak stated three advantages of having such a regulation:

i. The regulation would provide an incentive for students to increase their unit load and begin to change the campus culture that 12 units per quarter is normal progress.

ii. The regulation would not require re-uniting any courses, no modification of curriculum is necessary.

iii. The regulation would not directly or indirectly increase lower division unit requirements.
Understanding the importance of this regulation for conversion purposes, the Cross-College Committee on Conversion began to review documents from UCLA, UCD, UCI, UCSD, and UCSC. The policies ran the gamut of detail; some had intricate minimum enrollment and expected progress requirements (UCLA), some merely stated an annual unit amount (UCSD). Some included probation and subject to dismissal actions, some carefully charted expected progress units by quarters. The Committee members soon realized that they could not simply use one of the other campuses’ documents verbatim, but first had to develop a philosophy of Expected Progress, and corresponding actions, tailored to our campus and our student population. That conversation carried through several meetings and numerous electronic exchanges that eventually resulted in a draft of a regulation agreed upon by all members of the committee. The proposed regulation can be found in the appendix. Briefly, the proposed regulation expects a full-time undergraduate student to pass at least 45 units each academic year, declare a major by the time the student earns 90 units, follow the program of study consistent with the requirements of the declared major, and graduate when the requirements are met. Eligibility for continued registration is based on a student passing a minimum of 37 units each academic year. Continued registration for a student who fails to meet the criteria shall be at the discretion of the faculty in the student’s college or its authorized agent.

c. Increased Unit Caps for Students in Good Standing or on Academic Probation: Campus policy currently limits students in good standing to enrollment in 18 units per quarter, which can only be exceeded by petition to the appropriate Associate Dean for Student Academic Affairs. Each college also has a similar regulation for students on academic probation or subject to dismissal that limits the number of units to 13 per quarter in CNAS and BCOE, or 14 per quarter in CHASS. In order to encourage all students to enroll in a full-time load of 45 units per academic year, the members of the Cross-College Committee agreed that each college should revisit this set of regulations. We support an increase quarterly unit cap for students in academic difficulty to a number that would at least equal one FTE (15 units). The Committee further supports an increased unit cap for students in good standing to 20 units per quarter without the need for decanal approval. The CNAS faculty has recently approved such a regulation (provided in the appendix), and CHASS is considering a similar change. See Section 4 below for additional detail.

d. Improvement of UCR Freshman Experience Programs by Development of Learning Community/Curriculum Cluster Models: The campus has several new and existing initiatives and programs in Freshman Learning Communities. These have implications for freshman transitional success to university learning and retention of freshmen as continuing enrolled students. The curriculum clusters at the heart of the learning communities also provide a platform for pedagogical innovation in introductory courses, and may eventually serve as centerpieces for a restructured general education. The Cross-College Committee also recognized that the learning community initiatives have important implications for resolving the conversion ratio problem in at least two ways. The first is that the learning communities/curriculum clusters often include academic elements that carry one or two units of credit. These are further explained in the College-specific reports below. Secondly, the learning communities are anticipated to increase retention of freshmen into the sophomore year and beyond, thus improving campus enrollment.
e. **Unit Credit for Participation in Campus Cultural Events, Seminar Series, or Physical Education Courses:** The Cross-College Committee supported the development of unit bearing courses to be used to help students in academic difficulty learn relevant study methods, practice important time management skills and identify campus resources which are available to help make their transition from high school to the university more successful. Such courses reinforce the university mission of student success. The Committee also approved the concept of courses where students could earn credit for attendance at a proscribed number of cultural events (with written reaction papers). We further recommend more carefully and systematically conferring unit credit for Undergraduate Research. The Committee also discussed restoring academic unit value to Physical Education courses, which would promote activity and recreation for students, encourage the development of a wellness ethic, and to offer one/half to one unit opportunities to students needing to enroll in a full-load of units.

3. **College Specific Approaches**

a. **CHASS:** CHASS has undertaken several recent initiatives to enhance student success while promoting full-time status among the college’s student population. In addition, retention has played a big part in their efforts to increase student success. CHASS' first year experience programs, for example, are partially devoted to achieving this goal, with CHASS Connect having a proven track record of success in student persistence rates.

The CHASS Executive Committee has approved a proposal to increase the maximum number of units in which students may enroll each quarter: 20 units per quarter for successful students; 17 units per quarter for students on academic probation; and 15 units per quarter for students in subject to dismissal status. On an individual basis, the Associate Dean may approve enrollment in more units than the maximum. The proposal will appear before the appropriate committee of the Divisional Academic Senate during spring quarter.

CHASS has introduced two new 2-unit courses this year – HASS 001 and HASS 010. The first is directed at freshmen who are in academic difficulty after their first quarter at UCR, offering them support in developing study skills, learning better time management, and identifying useful campus resources. The second course requires that students attend ten cultural events on campus – plays, lectures, concerts – and write a one-page review of each event. Each course offers an opportunity for students to increase their unit load without adding a substantive 4 or 5 unit course.

The Office of Student Academic Affairs is monitoring student requests for part-time fee waivers to assess the extent of such requests, with the possibility of setting more stringent standards for approving such requests in the future. CHASS supports the importance of full time enrollment and the benefits that are derived both for the student and the university.

Throughout the last year, CHASS has undertaken a rather careful “housecleaning” exercise in which all departments in the college were asked to assess the number of units attached to their course offerings, and to adjust units according to the non-contact-hour demands they place on student time. Several departments undertaking this exercise discovered that there were a few courses in their offerings that required
sufficient outside-of-class demands on students as to warrant an increase from 4 to 5 units. A proposal for the re-uniting of 38 current courses and one restored course, plus the addition of seven new 5-unit courses was submitted to the appropriate Academic Senate committees in January 2006. Approval of the re-uniting was tabled amidst substantial discussion regarding the effect the increase of units would have on the breadth requirements of BCOE and CNAS majors.

CHASS also stepped up to initiate an expanded Freshmen Year Learning Community program to offer the experience to more of their freshmen students. The CHASS Connect program will continue serving 240 students, three sections providing a year long sequence of courses, significant interaction with program faculty and graduate teaching assistants, focused and personalized academic advising and peer mentorship throughout the first year. Two new experiences will begin next fall quarter. CHASS Gateway will feature an UCR scholar who will engage 150 freshmen enrolled a gateway course through the ideas and complexities of an annual CHASS theme (2006/07 is immigration) while introducing students to university life. Students in the Gateway discussion section will also be enrolled in the same English Composition course, so continued exploration of the theme through reading, writing and discussion will be encouraged and rewarded. The third initiative, Freshmen Learning Communities (FLC), provides for freshmen-only discussion groups in the larger introductory breadth courses that are taken by students in all levels. The discussion groups are connected to English Composition courses in the same fashion as the Gateway program. Undergraduate peer mentorship will be included in all three programs to help with the successful transition from high school into university life.

b. CNAS: CNAS is working to increase the conversion ratio for its students in a variety of ways. For reference, advising and other efforts in the college have already made a significant difference in these factors for their students. For example, from winter 05 to winter 06, the conversion ratio increased from 0.939 to 0.953; from spring 05 to spring 06, this factor increased from 0.933 to 0.944.

For the coming academic year, the CNAS Faculty approved a college regulation change that allows a student in academic difficulty, probation or subject to dismissal to take up to 15 units per quarter without decanal approval and a student in good academic standing to take up to 20 units per quarter without additional approval. These unit cap changes, in conjunction with the recently proposed divisional regulation on Expected Progress, should help increase the average conversion ratio for CNAS students.

Additionally, the CNAS Faculty have approved the Chemistry Department’s proposal to add a discussion section to the each of the three General Chemistry courses, CHEM 1A/1B/1C. Presently these courses are 4-unit courses, consisting of 3 hours of lecture and 3 hours (1 unit) of lab per week. The proposed one unit discussion sections, CHEM 1LA/1LB/1LC, will make the General Chemistry courses each a 5 unit course. With approximately 1,400 students taking these courses each academic year, the additional units will increase the college’s conversion ratio by approximately 0.17, corresponding to approximately 75 additional student FTE. As mentioned above, based on 2005-06 enrollment data this student FTE gain would be reduced by approximately 10% if BCOE students opted out of the additional unit.
Next fall the current CNAS Scholars Program will transition into the CNAS Freshmen Scholars Learning Community and is planned exclusively for first-year CNAS students planning to enroll in the course combination tracks of CHEM 1A/MATH 9A or CHEM 1W/MATH 5. Small workshop/study groups of 20 to 25 students will be formed within the tracks and those groups will stay together for the discussion groups in CHEM 1A or MATH 5 and the required CNAS Freshman Advising Seminar. The workshops are lead by peer mentors from the college who will attend lectures, present supplemental instruction, teach relevant study skills and help students to learn their way around the university and make a successful transition into college living. An increased enrollment of CNAS freshmen in the CNAS Freshmen Scholar Learning Community, will not only result in more new students carrying a full-time unit load, thus improving the conversion ratio, but will also enhance the persistence and success of CNAS students.

c. **BCOE:** The College of Engineering is incorporating Academic Learning Communities into their first year program. The communities will cluster engineering students enrolled in introductory level math, science and engineering courses into discussion and study groups. An entirely new Engineering residence hall will be started this fall, dedicated to BCOE students, and Housing Services working with BCOE, has agreed to facilitate relevant programming for engineering students living in these halls. It is well known that freshmen engineering students do not have much opportunity to connect with college’s faculty because they do not enroll in BCOE courses until their second year. To ensure that BCOE freshmen have contact with their college and its faculty, the BCOE Executive Committee recently has approved a series of new Engineering Professional Development courses for freshmen students which will be taught in tandem with the existing program-specific Introduction to Engineering courses. The student organizations will also strengthen their outreach program to encourage new freshmen to be involved and to take the time to participate in BCOE student activities.

Already in place is a strong academic advising program for both students in good-standing and those in academic difficulty. The option of raising quarterly unit caps to 15 for students on academic probation and 20 for students in good standing is currently under consideration by the BCOE Executive Committee. BCOE has an advisor who meets individually with all freshmen students. Academic intervention programs will be expanding in the fall and will incorporate services from the Learning Center and Supplemental Instruction support from Undergraduate Academic Programs.