

Deans Working Group for The Future of Work

June 2021

Work Group Members

Co-Chairs

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Raka Ray, Dean, L&S Division of Social Sciences

Mike Botchan, Dean, L&S Division of Biological Sciences

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Context

In the charge (see Appendix A) we were asked to address the following questions:

- What guiding principles should we use as the foundation for our decisions about the future of work for the Berkeley campus?
- What are the guiding principles and best practices for managers and supervisors to use in making decisions for implementing remote working arrangements in academic units, given the variation in work performed by staff?
- What are the unique aspects of academic unit work (research, teaching, student advising, etc.) that need to be considered when developing remote and hybrid work arrangements?
- What are possible best practices to balance remote work with the maintenance of campus community life?

At the request of the EVCP, our primary focus was on remote work in the “new normal” (post-pandemic). Some considerations, and thus decisions, may be different during the transition.

We approach this from a high-level, campus-wide abstraction. Particular decisions may be different across schools and programs, given, e.g., different needs for in-person presence, or different accreditation requirements.

Joint guidelines

We worked together with the administrative services Future of Work committee, chaired by Eugene Whitlock and James Ford, to develop shared, high-level guidelines for flexible work arrangements. The guidelines below were approved by both committees and accepted by the EVCP, and have been published in various documents shared to all members of campus.

1. Our mission at UC Berkeley, the top public university in the world, is to engage in world-class research, teaching and learning, and public service. As our teaching and research activities are predominantly conducted in-person, it is essential that in-person collaboration and community building continue. However, as we have learned during the pandemic, some roles, services and functions are well suited for various types of flexible work arrangements.
2. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing inequities, and therefore we approach reimagining the future of our work as an opportunity to actively promote employee well-being, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Actual and perceived fairness and equity need to be measured, monitored and maintained. Managers will be expected to seek solutions that advance the mission without disadvantaging or marginalizing any individual team member.

3. Two key questions guide our decision-making:

Question 1: Can we fulfill our mission as well as (or better than) we currently do if more of our employees have flexible schedules and/or work remotely?

Question 2: To what extent does greater provision of flexible schedules and remote work options enable us to recruit and retain a more diverse and high quality workforce?

4. The suitability of different activities for flexible work arrangements falls across a continuum: some activities require in-person presence and fixed schedules to serve the needs of the University, whereas for others those needs can be met, or even exceeded, through a flexible work arrangement. Managers must ground their decisions about flexible work arrangements on the mission of the University. Many factors affect mission success, including coming together as a community to foster respect, collegiality, and trust, as well as each individual's well-being. Managing expectations and clear communications are critical to this endeavor.
5. Subject to campus guidelines and applicable UC policies, details for implementing workplace changes should be developed at a local (e.g., school or department) level to the extent practical, taking into account the various potential campus impacts that may result from broader adoption of flexible work arrangements. Although we strive for consistency and equity across campus, two employees performing the exact same type of work (either in the same or different units) may call for two different types of flexible work arrangements because of the varying needs of their units and the varying circumstances of individual employees.
6. An individual's use of a flexible work arrangement should not be a factor in the review or assessment of their performance (other than to the extent the arrangement impacts performance), nor should it impact opportunities for professional development and career advancement.
7. We recognize that cultural shifts in the workplace can be intimidating, difficult, exciting, anxiety-inducing, and challenging to implement. Broader adoption of flexible work arrangements will need assessment, evaluation, continual refinement, and patience, particularly as we aspire to apply our processes consistently and equitably across the entire campus, and in service to the mission of the university. We understand 2021-22 to be a transitional year and we expect that workplace adjustments will change and be adjusted over time.

Considerations specific to academic units

Our committee was guided by the belief in the importance of a return to the workplace policy that treats staff respectfully and equitably. We support flexible work arrangements, consistent with the reality of our being a university where teaching and research is primarily done in person. We applied the high-level principles above to consideration of various key aspects of delivering the University's mission through the academic units that report to the EVCP. We

focused on: teaching, student advising, academic support staff and research. Underlying all of these is the importance of maintaining community for staff, students and faculty. Our deliberations about these matters were aided by listening sessions we conducted with department chairs and managers, as well as an informal poll of over 2000 staff members.

Community

The creation and promotion of campus community yields both intangible and tangible benefits. The sense of community is necessary for students, staff and faculty to feel as if they belong. One of the biggest losses this past year has been community building, which has been, by and large, unsuccessful via zoom. While some creative forms of remote check-ins have been devised, a sense of belonging is best achieved in person. Beyond a larger sense of belonging, community makes research and innovation thrive. While it may take some time for people to be comfortable with returning to campus, we believe that in the end, Berkeley cannot be Berkeley without the presence of people in the physical space, meeting, socializing, and discussing ideas together.

Much attention to flexible work arrangements has focused on the possibility that greater flexibility will improve recruiting and retention. But recruitment and retention are also aided by community: work satisfaction will often be higher if people feel connected to each other and part of a social group, which is easier to establish and nurture through in-person interactions.

Teaching

Berkeley is an in-person, residential university for the most part. Our default mode is that classes meet in person and faculty teach students in person. The in-class interaction of students and instructors delivers the heart of Berkeley's educational experience.

Nonetheless, we should be open to pedagogical innovation. If there are hybrid mode or remote curricular and pedagogical innovations that may help more students learn better, or that are suitable to certain subject areas, we should be open to exploring them.

Specific decisions about in-person versus remote course delivery should be made at the lowest relevant and feasible level: generally the department or school, subject to guidelines and requirements from the cognizant dean and the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate. Balancing local decision making should be an appeals process, usually at the school or college level, to address concerns about possible inequities in decisions about remote work.

Student advising

Student advising plays a crucial role in education, and thus decisions about whether and when it should be provided in-person versus remotely are important.¹ The shared goal is to ensure that students get the advice they need to help them navigate their years at Berkeley.

¹ We refer to advising as "remote" rather than online to encompass a variety of modes, including phone calls, email, and video conferencing.

There is substantial heterogeneity in advising: For example, undergraduate and graduate needs may differ. Also, some advising is provided by professional advising staff, other advising by faculty. Sessions vary from more formal (typically scheduled in advance) to more informal (e.g., quick questions via email or during chance encounters). And advising needs and styles may naturally vary across different disciplines and types of teaching programs.

Recognizing that guidelines should be flexibly applied in light of this heterogeneity, we recommend the following:

1. Going forward, formal advising should be available both in-person and remote. Though in-person interactions are often more effective, the latter can offer advantages to students (and advisors) including greater flexibility in the hours offered, reduced travel and waiting time, more productive interactions for some (e.g., those with social anxiety disorders).
2. Nonetheless, much as our default mode of teaching is in-person, we recommend that at least *initial advising encounters be in-person, especially for graduate student advising*. We believe stronger, more trusting relationships are likely if the advising experience begins in-person.
3. *Student preferences* for remote advising should be a consideration, but not the sole determinant for the amounts and type of advising offered remotely. The overriding consideration is the effect on the quality and effectiveness of our educational programs: student preferences for, say, convenience, may not always align with educational effectiveness.

Academic support staff

Academic support staff are at the heart of all academic units. Decisions about whether and when academic support staff should work remotely or in-person should be made keeping eyes on the ultimate goal shared by students, staff and faculty alike: the ability of the campus to maintain excellence in teaching and research, and to provide the best possible educational experience. While some tasks can be effectively done remotely, increasing place and time flexibility should not lessen staff availability even as they change *how* they are available.

1. Decisions about who can and cannot work remotely should be made based on the nature of the work. Each unit is therefore best equipped to make their own decisions about the work routines of academic support staff. The nature of work includes not just individual job functions, but also considerations of team effectiveness, community, and equity.
2. Managing expectations is critical. Chief administrators and/or chairs and directors should set forth general expectations for staff availability (when, where and how) and share those expectations with all affected faculty, staff and students. For example, the dean of a school could establish a minimum number of in-person days all staff need to be on campus, as well as the process and criteria for evaluating exceptions to such minimum in-person days requirement

based on considerations of mission, creativity, community, and equity."

3. Students, staff, and faculty should not be left confused about the availability of staff members, so clear communications are critical. There should be clear signposting on doors, and viewable online (e.g., on bcal and websites), indicating when and where each staff member is available, how they can be reached (e.g., if not in office, email address or phone number, which could be a campus phone privately routed to cell / home phone), whether they are accessible via Google Chat or Slack, whether they hold standing Zoom office hours (as an open channel for drop-ins), etc.
4. For some functions, there will be the need for people to be on site (e.g., to "replace the toner"), but we may need to be more flexible about how to provide these services. For example, there may be agreement shared across a staff team that anyone in the office at a particular moment will help with such tasks, rather than a single person.
5. If supervisors permit staff to work remotely, the supervisor needs to ensure that this does not leave relevant staff out of decision making, or otherwise create two separate "classes" of staff, with those working remotely at a disadvantage in key unit processes.
6. There should be some effort at sharing process information and coordinating across units to reduce the occurrence or perception of inequities.

Research

The research enterprise is enormous, and enormously complex. Research work practices differ dramatically across disciplines (and even within). We identified a few general key features of research activity that we believe might be (positively or negatively) affected by remote work practices: leaders and managers of research teams should consider these when determining their local remote work practices.

- *Creativity*. It is notoriously hard to demonstrate causal determinants. However, it is our collective lived experience that both formal and informal direct interaction stimulates creativity. Perhaps most at risk serendipitous information interactions, such as: the "lunch table" effect, e.g., conversations between scholars who don't normally work together. Remote work can have an especially adverse impact on informal interactions, as there are few informal, serendipitous opportunities in virtual environments.
- *Productivity*. For certain aspects of research, in-person interactions may be much more productive than virtual. For example, we have tools and experience using them to support in-person team research – even something as simple as the whiteboard. Also important: physical (non-IT) research infrastructure. Over this year we have seen steep declines in lab productivity in some fields, for example, when key players are not mostly on-site to deal with broken equipment, or to train each other on how to set up and use complex equipment.

- *Community.* We think it is likely, and very important, that the quality of research will be affected by the quality of community. For example, in any team endeavor that involves effort by individuals, sometimes long hours, uncertainty and stress, trust is a critical factor, and trust is positively correlated with stronger rather than weaker ties, more likely to follow from greater in-person interactions. We believe that community will also matter for research integrity: valuing colleague's opinions, and feeling responsible to the team are important factors supporting integrity in research.
- *Education.* Research is a crucial component of our education programs, especially for graduate students. Research leaders and managers should take into account not just the effects of remote work on the research performed, but on the quality and effectiveness of the educational experience. In our recent experience we have observed disadvantages to graduate education when students rarely see their laboratory principals.

Implementation of remote work practices for research should in most cases be done at the most local level possible, due to the extraordinary heterogeneity of the research enterprise. However, as with other academic activities, departments, schools and colleges, and the VCRO should have in place an appeal / review process, particularly to address concerns that remote work decisions may have resulted in inequities. We also suggest that units should also establish goals, metrics, and data collection methods by which they will continually monitor and reassess how the new work arrangements impact on mission, productivity, creativity, accessibility, community, and equity, but at least once at the end of the Fall semester, and make adjustments and improvements accordingly.

Appendix A - Charge to the Work Group



March 4, 2021

Jeff MacKie-Mason, University Librarian (Co-Chair)
Raka Ray, Dean, L&S Division of Social Sciences (Co-Chair)
Mike Botchan, Dean, L&S Division of Biological Sciences
Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean, Berkeley School of Law
Lisa Garcia Bedolla, Vice Provost, Graduate Studies; Dean, Graduate Division
Frances Hellman, Dean, L&S Division of Math & Physical Sciences
Michael Lu, Dean, School of Public Health
Diana Wu, Dean, University Extension

RE: Charge to the Deans Working Group on the *Future of Work*

Dear Colleagues,

I write to invite you to serve on a Deans Working Group on the *Future of Work*. This work group will be co-chaired by Jeff MacKie-Mason and Raka Ray.

I ask that you provide the Chancellor and me with your analysis and recommendations by June 1, 2021. Your report should address the following:

- What guiding principles should we use as the foundation for our decisions about the future of work for the Berkeley campus?
- What are the guiding principles and best practices for managers and supervisors to use in making decisions for implementing remote working arrangements in academic units, given the variation in work performed by staff?
- What are the unique aspects of academic unit work (research, teaching, student advising, etc.) that need to be considered when developing remote and hybrid work arrangements?
- What are possible best practices to balance remote work with the maintenance of campus community life?

The format is up to you; a short executive summary-style report with clear recommendations is preferred to a comprehensive report with extended analysis. Work group meetings and subcommittee meetings will be convened by co-chairs Jeff MacKie-Mason and Raka Ray.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Paul Alivisatos".

A. Paul Alivisatos
Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

cc: Council of Deans
Heather Archer, Assistant Vice Provost, Academic Personnel Office
James Ford, Chief of Staff, Academic Planning
Andrea Lambert, Chief of Staff to the Provost
Eugene Whitlock, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Chief People and Culture Officer
Chris Yetter, Senior Advisor to the Provost

Appendix B - Survey summary

When surveyed in April, these were staff responses:

This next question is about thinking about your workplace not this fall but a year from now. What is your preference for your work schedule when things normalize, say a year from now?

2,260 responses

