

# UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, ACADEMIC SENATE

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*Chair of the Assembly and the Academic Council  
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University of California  
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July 15, 2011

**PROVOST AND EVP LAWRENCE PITTS  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

**Re: Request for UCOE Evaluation Plan**

Dear Larry:

At its meeting on June 22, the Academic Council unanimously endorsed a request from UCEP that the UC Online Education pilot project evaluation team provides to UCEP details of the evaluation plan for the pilot courses within the next few weeks. I have enclosed UCEP's letter, which provides details about the kinds of information they are seeking.

In addition, for your information, Council endorsed UCEP's other recommendation that Council appoint an independent "blue-ribbon panel" of experts to review and report periodically to the Senate on the progress and results of the evaluation. We will send you a list of members of that group when we constitute it and ask that you direct the managers of UCOE to respond to their requests. We hope that the group will serve as a conduit of information about the online pilot project between the administration and the Senate.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Daniel L. Simmons, Chair  
Academic Council

Copy: Daniel Greenstein, Vice Provost, APPC  
Academic Council  
Martha Winnacker, Academic Senate Executive Director

Encl.



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY (UCEP)  
David G. Kay, Chair  
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June 16, 2011

Dan Simmons, Chair  
ACADEMIC COUNCIL

**Re: Evaluation of Online Education Pilot Project**

Executive summary: To ensure that the evaluation of the UC Online Education Pilot Project produces results at the usual standard of UC scholarship, UCEP recommends (a) that the evaluation team provide, within a few weeks, details of the evaluation plan and (b) that an independent "blue-ribbon panel" of experts be appointed to review and report periodically to the Senate on the progress and results of the evaluation.

Dear Dan,

At its meeting on June 6, 2011, UCEP discussed the UC Online Education Pilot Project and addressed in particular the recently raised concerns about the independence and validity of the pilot project's planned evaluation component.

UCEP's mandate, and that of the Senate broadly, is to bring the faculty's perspective into UC decision-making, in this case by using the pilot project and its evaluation to recommend to the president whether UC should continue to build out a large online education program. To that end, UCEP needs good, clear, credible, scholarly information from the evaluation of the pilot project. At this point we want to know what form we should expect that information to take.

The "Project Plan" document of March 24, 2011, provides very little detail about the evaluation, not having been written for that purpose. Nor was there a full competitive process to select the evaluation team; if there had been, the formal proposals would almost certainly have provided the information we currently lack, such as the following:

- What prior work has been done in the area of evaluating online instruction in higher education? What about the much-touted failure at Illinois—was it a failure of quality, of economics, or something else? Michigan is reported to do a lot of online education; what are their experiences and results?
- What are the questions to be evaluated and what are the criteria for evaluating them? What benchmarks or comparisons will be used? UCEP is concerned that questions formed after the data is gathered may be influenced by the data.

- What data will be collected, how frequently, and how will they be used? Will the same questions be asked about all 29 courses? Will there be some common questions across all courses?
- What human-subjects applications have been filed or approved? We would like to see them.
- Who are the personnel who will be conducting the study? We would like to see a set of CVs.
- What is the projected schedule for the various aspects of the evaluation, as best it can be estimated today?

Our first recommendation is that Council request answers to these questions, with a target date of early July. We understand that the evaluation team at UCOP is preparing such a document at present. UCEP will review this information; at Council's option it could have wider distribution.

Our second recommendation is that Council form an independent "blue-ribbon panel" of experts on online education and assessing higher education, chosen from within UC and from outside. This panel would receive periodic updates, perhaps quarterly, as the evaluation of the pilot project progresses; based on those updates, the panel would report to the Senate its conclusions and recommendations about the progress of the pilot project and its evaluation.

We do not view these actions as extraordinary in any way; the pilot project has always been described as a research-oriented undertaking, and any such undertaking would start with a thorough proposal of the work to be done and continue with periodic peer review of the results.

We look forward to Council's action on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. G. Kay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

David G. Kay, Chair  
UCEP