

University of California
Policy for A-G Review of Online Courses
Approved by BOARS May 4, 2012

The University of California (UC) aims to ensure that students have enhanced access to a broad range of high-quality courses, including online courses, that meet the faculty’s standards of rigor for the purposes of UC admissions eligibility. As such, the University’s revised online policy (effective for the online courses completed during the 2013-14 academic year and submitted during the 2013-14 course list update cycle) offers a new, streamlined process for the approval of online courses that satisfy UC “a-g” subject requirements. This policy and accompanying processes have been developed to uphold the [UC Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools \(BOARS\) Statement on K-12 Online Learning](#).

The former policy adopted by BOARS in October 2006 required an online provider to apply for “program status” and thereby receive UC authorization as an approved provider before it could submit specific courses for “a-g” review. The revised policy identifies three primary mechanisms under which high school students will access online courses: (1) through their local school or district, which will purchase or license content (online courses) for delivery by teachers within that school or district; (2) through an online school¹ that offers courses that it has developed via the internet to students regardless of their geographic location, and (3) through an online school that offers courses that it has purchased or licensed. This policy provides the process through which an online course can be submitted for “a-g” review by an online publisher or an online school, and the process under which a school can offer approved “a-g” courses that it has purchased or licensed.

The new policy is intended to be flexible enough to accommodate synchronous, asynchronous, and blended online courses, taught locally or remotely, while simultaneously addressing the specific features that UC faculty consider necessary to offer a quality online learning experience for students. These features include, among others, primary instruction and academic support by teachers who are content experts, maintenance of a “human touch” in the learning process through appropriate student-to-teacher ratios, integrity of student assessment, and broad access to online courses regardless of a particular student’s geographic or financial situation. UC faculty are most concerned that schools allowing students to use online curriculum provide an on-site mentor/supervisor to support those students. Further, they recommend that the school or district fully consider the infrastructure and support services necessary to assure success for students taking online courses. UC faculty and Admissions staff recommend that high school leaders implement practices and policies in the [California Department of Education \(AB 294\) guidelines](#) and the [iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Programs](#), as appropriate.

¹ UC adopts the definition of “virtual school” used in the [California County Superintendents Educational Services Association’s \(CCSESA\) California eLearning Framework](#) document. Thus, a virtual or online school is any educational organization that offers K-12 courses through Internet-based methods, with time and/or distance separating the teacher and learner; students enroll to earn credit towards grade-level advancement and/or graduation. In California, a virtual or online charter school is one “in which at least 80 percent of teaching and student interaction occurs via the Internet” (per [California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 11963.5](#)).

This policy takes advantage of the growing consensus about the elements that are necessary for a high-quality online course and for a high-quality online school. In this regard, the policy builds on the work done by the [International Association for K-12 Online Learning \(iNACOL\)](#) in developing standards for quality online [courses](#), [teaching](#), and [programs](#), and involves a partnership between the University of California and the [California Learning Resource Network \(CLRN\)](#).

CLRN is supported by the California Department of Education to review online courses for both content and quality. The CLRN content review determines which California Content Standards or Common Core State Standards are met by online courses (to fulfill high school graduation requirements), and examines the extent to which material is covered and assessed. CLRN also reviews courses against iNACOL's [National Standards for Quality Online Courses](#), a set of 52 criteria across the areas of content, instructional design, student assessment, technology, and course evaluation and support².

UC will consider for “a-g” review a course submitted by an online publisher or online school once it has been “CLRN-certified,” meaning that the course (1) meets at least 80% of the relevant content standards; (2) satisfies at least 80% of all iNACOL standards for quality online courses; and (3) fully satisfies a subset of the iNACOL course standards, referred to as “power standards.” An online school seeking to offer “a-g” courses must also submit a New Online School Information Form showing, among other things, that it has been accredited as a high school by the appropriate regional agency and demonstrating that it operates according to the [iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Programs](#).

The details of the procedures for submitting courses for “a-g” review and for qualifying as an approved online school using separately approved “a-g” courses are provided below.

For Online Course Publishers³:

STEP 1

A course publisher must first submit the online course intended for UC's “a-g” review to the [California Learning Resource Network \(CLRN\)](#) for review. CLRN evaluates course content based on California Content Standards or Common Core State Standards. CLRN also evaluates courses against the [iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses](#), which include five sections:

- Section A: Content
- Section B: Instructional Design
- Section C: Student Assessment
- Section D: Technology
- Section E: Course Evaluation and Support

UC will consider the online course “CLRN-certified” if the course (1) meets at least 80% of the relevant content standards; (2) fulfills all 15 of the following “Power Standards”

² A list of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses is provided at the end of this document.

³ For a course submitted under this part of the process, it is expected that the teacher of the course is not employed by the content developer.

from the iNACOL standards for quality online courses⁴: [A3, A9, A13, B3, B4, B5, B10, C2, C3, C4, D4, D10, D11, E3, and E10](#); and (3) meets at least 27 of the remaining iNACOL online course standards.

Once a course is CLRN-certified, the course publisher may then proceed to STEP 2.

STEP 2

A course publisher submits the CLRN-certified online course to UC for “a-g” review using the [“a-g” Online Updates](#) website, accessible via [UC Doorways](#). UC articulation analysts will then review the course submission to determine whether the online course meets the content criteria established by UC faculty as outlined in the [“a-g” Subject Area Requirements](#) section of the [“a-g” Guide](#).

For Online Schools Using Their Own Curriculum:

STEP 1A

To be eligible to submit online courses to UC for “a-g” review, an online school must be accredited by a regional or national accrediting agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education⁵, and demonstrate that it operates according to the [iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Programs](#). An online school seeking “a-g” recognition of the courses it will offer must also complete the New Online School Information Form.

STEP 1B

An online school must submit the online course intended for UC’s “a-g” review to the [California Learning Resource Network \(CLRN\)](#) for review. CLRN evaluates course content based on California Content Standards or Common Core State Standards. CLRN also evaluates courses against the [iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses](#), which include five sections:

- Section A: Content
- Section B: Instructional Design
- Section C: Student Assessment
- Section D: Technology
- Section E: Course Evaluation and Support

UC will consider the online course “CLRN-certified” if the course (1) meets at least 80% of the relevant content standards; (2) fulfills all 15 of the following “Power Standards” from the iNACOL standards for quality online courses: [A3, A9, A13, B3, B4, B5, B10, C2, C3, C4, D4, D10, D11, E3, and E10](#); and (3) meets at least 27 of the remaining iNACOL online course standards.

⁴ The UC Power Standards of the National Standards for Quality Online Courses are identified by an asterisk in the list at the end of this document.

⁵ For a list of U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting agencies, see: <http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/Agencies.aspx>

Once UCOP staff have verified the school's accreditation and approved its response to the questions addressing program quality, and the courses have received CLRN certification, the school will be provided login information to the [UC Doorways](#) website and may proceed to STEP 2.

Note that STEPS 1A and 1B can be initiated simultaneously as the two reviews involved are conducted independently.

STEP 2

The online school may submit individual CLRN-certified online courses to UC for "a-g" review using the ["a-g" Online Updates](#) website, accessible via [UC Doorways](#). UC articulation analysts will then review each course submission to determine whether the online course meets the content criteria established by UC faculty as outlined in the ["a-g" Subject Area Requirements](#) section of the ["a-g" Guide](#).

For Programs, Schools or Districts Using Other "a-g" Approved Curriculum:

To be eligible to offer online courses that will be accepted by UC as satisfying the "a-g" criteria, an online school must be accredited by a regional or national accrediting agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education⁶, and must complete the New Online School Information Form. It is expected that all programs offering online courses will operate according to the [iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Programs](#).

⁶ For a list of U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting agencies, see: <http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/Agencies.aspx>

[iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses](#)

Standards identified by an asterisk (*) must be satisfied for a course to become CLRN-certified.

Section A: Content	<i>The course provides online learners with multiple ways of engaging with learning experiences that promote their mastery of content and are aligned with state or national content standards.</i>
1	The goals and objectives clearly state what the participants will know or be able to do at the end of the course. The goals and objectives are measurable in multiple ways.
2	The course content and assignments are aligned with the state’s content standards, common core curriculum, or other accepted content standards set for Advanced Placement courses, technology, computer science, or other courses whose content is not included in the state standards.
3*	The course content and assignments are of sufficient rigor, depth and breadth to teach the standards being addressed.
4	Information literacy and communication skills are incorporated and taught as an integral part of the curriculum.
5	Multiple learning resources and materials to increase student success are available to students before the course begins.
6	A clear, complete course overview and syllabus are included in the course.
7	Course requirements are consistent with course goals, are representative of the scope of the course and are clearly stated.
8	Information is provided to students, parents and mentors on how to communicate with the online instructor and course provider.
9*	The course reflects multi-cultural education, and the content is accurate, current and free of bias or advertising.
10	Expectations for academic integrity, use of copyrighted materials, plagiarism and netiquette (Internet etiquette) regarding lesson activities, discussions, and e-mail communications are clearly stated.
11	Privacy policies are clearly stated.
12	Online instructor resources and notes are included.
13*	Assessment and assignment answers and explanations are included.

[iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses](#) (continued)

Standards identified by an asterisk (*) must be satisfied for a course to become CLRN-certified.

Section B: Instructional Design	<i>The course uses learning activities that engage students in active learning; provides students with multiple learning paths to master; the content is based on student needs; and provides ample opportunities for interaction and communication — student to student, student to instructor and instructor to student.</i>
1	Course design reflects a clear understanding of all students’ needs and incorporates varied ways to learn and master the curriculum.
2	The course is organized by units and lessons that fall into a logical sequence. Each unit and lesson includes an overview describing objectives, activities, assignments, assessments, and resources to provide multiple learning opportunities for students to master the content.
3*	The course instruction includes activities that engage students in active learning.
4*	The course and course instructor provide students with multiple learning paths, based on student needs that engage students in a variety of ways.
5*	The course provides opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking, critical reasoning activities and thinking in increasingly complex ways.
6	The course provides options for the instructor to adapt learning activities to accommodate students’ needs.
7	Readability levels, written language assignments and mathematical requirements are appropriate for the course content and grade-level expectations.
8	The course design provides opportunities for appropriate instructor-student interaction, including opportunities for timely and frequent feedback about student progress.
9	The course design includes explicit communication/activities (both before and during the first week of the course) that confirms whether students are engaged and are progressing through the course. The instructor will follow program guidelines to address non-responsive students.
10*	The course provides opportunities for appropriate instructor-student and student-student interaction to foster mastery and application of the material.
11	Students have access to resources that enrich the course content.

[iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses](#) (continued)

Standards identified by an asterisk (*) must be satisfied for a course to become CLRN-certified.

Section C: Student Assessment	<i>The course uses multiple strategies and activities to assess student readiness for and progress in course content and provides students with feedback on their progress.</i>
1	Student evaluation strategies are consistent with course goals and objectives, are representative of the scope of the course and are clearly stated.
2*	The course structure includes adequate and appropriate methods and procedures to assess students' mastery of content.
3*	Ongoing, varied, and frequent assessments are conducted throughout the course to inform instruction.
4*	Assessment strategies and tools make the student continuously aware of his/ her progress in class and mastery of the content.
5	Assessment materials provide the instructor with the flexibility to assess students in a variety of ways.
6	Grading rubrics are provided to the instructor and may be shared with students.
7	The grading policy and practices are easy to understand.

Section D: Technology	<i>The course takes full advantage of a variety of technology tools, has a user-friendly interface and meets accessibility standards for interoperability and access for learners with special needs.</i>
1	The course architecture permits the online instructor to add content, activities and assessments to extend learning opportunities.
2	The course accommodates multiple school calendars; e.g., block, 4X4 and traditional schedules.
3	Clear and consistent navigation is present throughout the course.
4*	Rich media are provided in multiple formats for ease of use and access in order to address diverse student needs.
5	All technology requirements (including hardware, browser, software, etc...) are specified.
6	Prerequisite skills in the use of technology are identified.
7	The course uses content-specific tools and software appropriately.
8	The course is designed to meet internationally recognized interoperability standards.
9	Copyright and licensing status, including permission to share where applicable, is clearly stated and easily found.
10*	Course materials and activities are designed to provide appropriate access to all students. The course, developed with universal design principles in mind, conforms to the U.S. Section 504 and Section 508 provisions for electronic and information technology as well as the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0).
11*	Student information remains confidential, as required by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

[iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses](#) (continued)

Standards identified by an asterisk (*) must be satisfied for a course to become CLRN-certified.

Section E: Course Evaluation & Support	<i>The course is evaluated regularly for effectiveness, using a variety of assessment strategies, and the findings are used as a basis for improvement. The course is kept up to date, both in content and in the application of new research on course design and technologies. Online instructors and their students are prepared to teach and learn in an online environment and are provided support during the course.</i>
1	The course provider uses multiple ways of assessing course effectiveness.
2	The course is evaluated using a continuous improvement cycle for effectiveness and the findings used as a basis for improvement.
3*	The course is updated periodically to ensure that the content is current.
4	Course instructors, whether face-to- face or virtual, are certificated and “highly qualified.” The online course teacher possesses a teaching credential from a state-licensing agency and is “highly qualified” as defined under ESEA.
5	Professional development about the online course delivery system is offered by the provider to assure effective use of the courseware and various instructional media available.
6	The course provider offers technical support and course management assistance to students, the course instructor, and the school coordinator.
7	Course instructors, whether face-to- face or virtual, have been provided professional development in the behavioral, social, and when necessary, emotional, aspects of the learning environment.
8	Course instructors, whether face-to- face or virtual, receive instructor professional development, which includes the support and use of a variety of communication modes to stimulate student engagement online.
9	The provider assures that course instructors, whether face-to-face or virtual, are provided support, as needed, to ensure their effectiveness and success in meeting the needs of online students.
10*	Students are offered an orientation for taking an online course before starting the coursework.