



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY (UCEP)
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Assembly of the Academic Senate
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June 14, 2024

**HAN MI YOON-WU, ASSOCIATE VICE PROVOST AND
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS**

RE: UCEP POLICY ON CREDIT BY EXAM

Dear Han Mi,

UCEP has considered the issue of “credit by exam” from external entities at several meetings between February and April, 2024. As a policy, we do not approve continued vetting and adoption of exams administered by outside entities beyond the AP and IB organizations whose offerings we currently accept.

Creative struggle and hours spent in intellectual practice are essential elements of the undergraduate education provided by UC coursework. Although it has become common to afford course credit by examination, this should be considered to be a misnomer. The phrase implicitly suggests that students can receive course credit solely for completing the sorts of things that can be shown by good performance on a single examination. And while examinations are normally part of a UC education, not every important component of a UC education is captured by examinations. **We should not think of examinations as a substitute for the UC learning experience.** There is no basis to believe that incoming students should, as a matter of general principle, receive units whenever they can show performance on a single exam comparable to that of the final exam of a UC-level course. Consider the following hypothetical example: A laboratory course involves 3-4 hours of experimental work per week in addition to background reading, analyzing, and graphing data, and writing about the results. Many lab courses also include a lecture to discuss concepts and procedures. A lab final exam, covering topics relevant to the experimental processes taught in the course, is often given during finals week. We would not confer lab course credit for merely passing an exam on these concepts as a substitute for the practical experience of having learned how to work with equipment and conduct experiments correctly. Similarly, there are many practical benefits to the hours of work a student performs in standard courses including (but not limited to): developing strategies to solve problems, practice in performing calculations, becoming conversant in the language specific to their discipline, engaging in critical thinking about the topics in question, confronting the diverse perspectives of their classmates, developing collaborative skills, learning to interact with peers and mentors in a complex learning environment, and cultivating effective communication skills in their responses to homework and writing prompts.

The "UC Quality" document recently drafted by UCEP describes the importance of teacher-student and student-to-student interactions, and the value of hearing alternative viewpoints. None of these learning opportunities are likely to be captured by standardized tests. Furthermore, the UC Quality document states that courses should:

- *provide ample opportunities for informal and less-structured interactions that enable learning and development of perspectives beyond those that can easily be captured by typical tests and other structured assessments.*
- *do the above over an extended period of time, enabling students to reflect in a temporally extended way on what they are learning.*

AP and IB are well-established entities who have earned our trust. Current AP and IB curricula do involve many of the features of UC quality, with the examination normally given as the culmination of a rich learning experience, even if in unusual cases students pass the exam independently of having taken the specific AP course. A "credit by exam" developed, for example, by a for-profit entity is much more likely to simply be an exam independent of a full temporally extended, expert-led, peer-involving educational curriculum. There should not be unlimited opportunities for entities that are not as established as the AP and IB to design tests to be approved as "credit by exam". This is due both to (a.) staff and faculty time needed to evaluate proposals, and (b.) the fact that their plan of action would likely require monitoring by the UC to ensure they are being implemented rigorously (e.g., to prevent cheating). **UC faculty are under no obligation to provide a path for outside entities to replace our coursework.** Moreover, by opening the door broadly, **we would incentivize for-profit companies to exploit our labor** in rounds and rounds of review to help them design tests, or maybe even curricula.

Although these exams may provide a useful metric of proficiency for consideration in admissions, we have no enthusiasm for having outside exams replace UC courses. UCEP appreciates the opportunity to comment on this matter. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melanie Cocco". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melanie Cocco, Chair
UCEP

cc: Senate Chair Steintrager
BOARS Chair Knowlton
Executive Director Lin