



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY (UCEP)
Melanie Cocco, Chair
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Assembly of the Academic Senate
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July 23, 2024

**DIVISIONAL UNDERGRADUATE COUNCILS &
COMMITTEES ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY**

RE: CREDIT BY EXAMINATION

Dear Divisional Undergraduate Councils and Committees on Educational Policy,

This past year, Undergraduate Admissions informed UCEP that many exams that have primarily been international, like Cambridge, are now being offered in the United States and have been increasingly taken by students who come to UC. However, Admissions is less familiar with these exams than the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) and the International Baccalaureate (IB), and there is no uniform process for reviewing them. Undergraduate Admissions requested that UCEP consider a systemwide policy on awarding college credit across the UC to students who earn a specific score on an external course or exam, and the committee also consulted with the chair of BOARS.

Among UCEP members, there was firm agreement that taking one exam is not a substitute for the robust educational experience offered in the classroom. Moreover, accounts of widespread student cheating on these exams raises significant concerns that they may not provide certification in mastery of skills. In a [June memo included in the appendix and linked here](#), UCEP notified Undergraduate Admissions that it does not approve vetting and adoption of exams administered by outside entities beyond the AP and IB, organizations whose offerings UC currently accepts.

However, UCEP members recognized that there may be rare, exceptional cases where an outside exam might be useful for a particular degree program or major. For this reason, the members of UCEP agreed that Divisions might want to review an outside exam for course credit on their campus. This would be entirely contingent on the willingness of that campus' UGC/CEPs to review the exam. Notably, it is within the right of those Divisional committees to refuse this request based on the same rationale that UCEP has put forward in declining to review external exams for systemwide course credit.

UCEP asks that this memo be shared with your committee members. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melanie Cocco".

Melanie Cocco, Chair
UCEP

cc: Senate Divisional Executive Directors
Associate Vice Provost & Executive Director Yoon-Wu



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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.

APPENDIX

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,



Melanie Cocco, Chair
UCEP

cc: Senate Chair Steintrager
BOARS Chair Knowlton
Executive Director Lin