

# UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, ACADEMIC SENATE

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May 6, 2011

**PRESIDENT MARK G. YUDOF**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

**Re: Online education pilot program**

Dear Mark:

Last year the Academic Council endorsed the UC online education pilot program with the understanding that only private funding was to be used to support the program. At the time it was suggested that as much as \$30M could be raised from extramural sources to support this program. Since then, 29 letters of intent from UC faculty were selected out of 70 submissions for the planning phase of the online pilot courses. Despite the optimistic funding projections, however, only \$748K in private funding from Next Generation Learning Challenges (funded by the Gates and Hewlett foundations) has been secured, and that funding requires that course material be open-source, available to others to freely use and adapt. The majority of funds for the online pilot courses are to come from a loan that UC will make to the program of up to \$6.9M. The loan is intended to be repaid with fees from non-UC students taking the pilot online courses.

The members of the Council have received multiple expressions of concern from faculty about the changes in both the funding and planning for the project compared with that originally was endorsed by the Council. I am instructed by the Council to communicate the scope of the concerns raised across the campuses.

The Council's concerns reflect neither on the work of our colleagues in crafting pilot course proposals, nor on our support for experimenting with online education to produce educational flexibility and to improve access to UC-quality courses for prospective transfer students. Rather, the Council's questions are raised in relation to the pilot program as a whole, as outlined in the **Project Plan: UC Online Education** (March 24, 2011). There are questions on oversight and evaluation of the program, the dependence of the budget model on enrollments of non-UC students, the corresponding focus on lower division requirements and possible competition with the Community College mission, and the financial feasibility of paying back the loan. The program description, as well as any program protocols and communications regarding the program, must be clear that there is no guarantee of UC undergraduate admission upon completion of the online courses and that there is as of yet no mechanism for establishing eligibility for transfer on the basis of the courses in the program description. Additionally, there is no coherent curriculum design reflected in the courses, nor has a transfer curriculum been proposed as part of the program. The fundamental question of whether an on-line curriculum can or should provide the basis of a transfer curriculum separate from a course of study at an accredited institution has not been raised and remains to be addressed. The

Council also questions how non-UC students' qualifications are to be determined and, given other equally attractive and perhaps more affordable online courses, whether the enrollments will be sufficient to be able to pay back the loan. In short, while the pilot project was intended to enhance access and to generate revenue, it is now unclear whether these goals may be meshed and met.

Council also notes that while the project description indicates that courses will be offered beginning July 2011, to our knowledge no course proposals have yet been submitted to Senate course committees for approval *as part of the pilot project*. We understand that at this point courses may not be sufficiently developed to move forward as part of the project. Yet the project description lists as a program "risk" the possibility that Senate courses committees will be slow to grant course approval. The Council wants to be clear that delays in implementation of the program beyond what is contemplated in the program description are not attributable to a lack of Senate action, but to the fact that the program proponents underestimated the time required to put courses into place. Senate evaluation should necessarily encompass both the intellectual content of the class materials and the modality of delivery.

Given these concerns, the Council advises that no additional online pilot courses be developed, beyond those currently selected and funded, until the following takes place:

(1) The evaluation procedure contemplated in the proposal must be conducted and then subjected to independent rigorous review in order to assess online courses that are taught in this pilot program. We fully appreciate that evaluation tools to assess the online program are a significant element of the project and, when developed, these tools might be useful to assess the quality of other courses within the UC system. The quality and desirability of the courses as a means of producing a high-quality online component to UC education should be assessed. The efficacy of the technological aspects of the course delivery (appropriate platform, testing mechanism, etc.), the business model beyond the pilot program (profitability), and the pros and cons of this educational direction for UC should be assessed.

(2) Any full proposal for expanding the online pilot program would be developed on the basis of the findings in (1), defining the proposed expansion, its aims and objectives, the scope and impact on the system, and the funding model.

On behalf of the Academic Council,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Daniel L. Simmons". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Daniel" being the most prominent part.

Daniel L. Simmons, Chair  
Academic Council

Copy: Lawrence Pitts, Provost and EVP  
Daniel Greenstein, Vice Provost  
Robert Anderson, Academic Council Vice Chair  
Academic Council  
Martha Winnacker, Academic Senate Executive Director