

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, ACADEMIC SENATE

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*Chair of the Assembly and the Academic Council
Faculty Representative to the Board of Regents
University of California
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, California 94607-5200*

May 11, 2010

PROVOST AND EVP PITTS VICE PROVOST GREENSTEIN

Re: Online Learning Pilot Project

Dear Larry and Dan:

At the recommendation of UCEP, the Academic Council unanimously endorsed proceeding with the pilot project on online learning as proposed in the prospectus prepared by UCOP's Academic Planning, Programs and Coordination unit. Please note, however, that this endorsement is contingent on the procurement of external funds and that Council does not endorse the redirection of existing funds to this effort.

Last year a Senate Special Committee on Remote and Online Instruction recommended a graduated approach to online instruction that would incorporate assessment. The proposed project's value lies in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the online courses developed. This approach should address questions about the circumstances in which UC-quality online courses can be offered. As UCEP's letter states, "This is a chance for UC to do what it does best – use a research-based model to investigate the level and means that online education can contribute most effectively to instruction at UC."

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry C. Powell", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Henry C. Powell, Chair
Academic Council

Copy: Academic Council
Martha Winnacker, Academic Senate Executive Director



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY (UCEP)
Keith Williams, Chair
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April 5, 2010

Henry Powell, CHAIR
ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Re: Endorsement of Academic Planning Online Project

Dear Harry,

UCEP has recently reviewed a revised draft prospectus (version 11) from Academic Planning concerning development of a project that would investigate a variety of issues related to online instruction at the University of California, and proposes endorsement of this project by the Academic Council as an indication of the faculty's willingness to fully participate in the project as a means of evaluating the most viable methods for online education at UC. UCEP has interacted with Academic Planning since early last fall and seen this project evolve from one aimed at far-reaching future uses of online education to one focused on first demonstrating how online education can be done most effectively at UC. The primary intent of the project is now focused on establishing a series of courses that would help answer the questions that have arisen from faculty regarding modes of delivery, startup and ongoing costs, means of assessment to allow quality to be evaluated, and issues related to faculty workload and the integrity of the academic process using online education. The project is still dependent on external funding and we believe the concerns consistently raised by faculty regarding online education can best be addressed by full participation of the Senate in the process.

This project is a natural follow-up to the recommendations from the special senate committee on online education that submitted its report last summer. That report advocated continued development of online education at UC, raised a number of critical questions to be addressed before widespread adoption, and suggested a pilot project similar to what is currently proposed. While looking further into online education may be especially relevant in the continuing budgetary crisis, it is also appropriate for UC to investigate how online education can help improve the scope and quality of education in a variety of areas so that we can maintain our status as a leading public university system. While the Senate has repeatedly recognized the benefits of face-to-face instruction, we also realize the need to stay current with alternate modes of education and developing technologies that can leverage our expertise and funding in ways that help us meet our educational objectives. There are already many examples within UC of successful online education, and a number of faculty who are adamant about its potential to expand educational horizons. There are also faculty who are concerned that this is step toward a reduced quality education for a top flight university such as UC, and we need to fully address those concerns to identify how online education can be used effectively at UC, in what types of classes or disciplines it can be used to advantage, how it will affect instructional costs, how it fares relative to traditional teaching methods in meeting learning objectives, and

whether it can help us meet the variety of challenges we face to be able continue to offer the highest level of education while maintaining or increasing access to the University.

The project proposes to use external funds to develop a set of approximately twenty-five courses based on a framework for course design that will be developed jointly by administration and faculty. By seeking proposals from faculty, courses could be developed that would address issues such as: how best to teach introductory, GE, or gateway courses that are critical to student progress; whether it is feasible to teach across several campuses a large-enrollment course, evaluating whether this would gain benefits through economy of scale without detracting from quality, or to teach a smaller-enrollment course that couldn't be justified on a single campus; how best to evaluate the quality of online courses relative to traditional methods to identify what works best; or whether access by high school or community college students to selected courses can help improve the background of students when they enter UC. There has already been formed a joint senate/administrative task force to oversee the project, but we would suggest that UCEP should continue to be closely involved with the development and oversight of the project to provide a wider faculty representation. Ultimately faculty must approve online courses and the curricula they contribute to, so it is essential that the senate review process be involved in a meaningful way in both the development and evaluation of the project.

While the project has evolved a great deal, there are still many issues related to online education at UC that need refinement and clarification. This pilot project provides a means for addressing many of the questions that have been inherent in senate discussions, and we endorse going forward with this project as a joint effort between Academic Planning and the Academic Senate, contingent on the availability of adequate external funding. This is a chance for UC to do what it does best – use a research-based model to investigate the level and means that online education can contribute most effectively to instruction at UC.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Keith R. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Keith" and last name "Williams" clearly legible.

Keith Williams, Chair
UCEP