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*Chair of the Assembly and the Academic Council
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May 27, 2011

President Mark Yudof
Provost and Executive Vice President Larry Pitts
Vice Provost Dan Greenstein
Dean Chris Edley
University of California
Office of the President

RE: Online Education Project Plan

Dear Mark, Larry, Dan, and Chris:

As I indicated in my letter of May 6, 2011 to President Yudof, last year the Academic Council endorsed the UC online education pilot program based upon assertions that the program would be financed with from external funding sources.¹ The Council's endorsement of the program was contingent upon the receipt of such external funding. In late April, the Senate received a copy of the current UC Online Education Project Plan (dated March 24, 2011) with its reliance on up to \$6.9 million of UC funds that are projected to be repaid by fees charged to non-UC students who participate in online courses. My letter of May 6 reflects a preliminary assessment of the project plan by the Council at its April 27 meeting. That letter communicated Council's request that no online courses be developed in addition to the 29 proposals accepted for development until:

- (1) The evaluation procedure contemplated in the proposal is conducted and then subjected to independent, rigorous review in order to assess online courses that are taught in this pilot program, and
- (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.

Following its April meeting, Council circulated the March 24 project plan for further review by Senate agencies. Although the Senate did not receive the project plan with sufficient time to

¹ "Making Online Undergraduate Education Work at UC: A Pilot Project Draft Prospectus (Version 13, 9/29/10), 5.

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undertake a formal review, the Council solicited feedback from divisions and committees, which is summarized below. At its May 25, 2011 meeting the Council adopted the attached formal recommendations based upon that feedback. For your information, the multiple comments from campus divisions and Senate standing committees are also forwarded with this letter.

The Academic Council affirms its support for developing and evaluating the effectiveness of online courses for UC students with the goals of maintaining the quality of and improving access to UC undergraduate education. Council recognizes the value of exploring pedagogical innovation to enhance the learning experience for UC students. In addition, we have full confidence that our faculty colleagues who have been selected to participate in the pilot project will produce high-quality courses, and we support their efforts. Council stresses, however, that the primary goal of UC online education must be to enhance access for UC students to courses and provide educational opportunity in a quality online environment. Council also recognizes that online courses have potential for improving access to the University for non-UC students, but notes that this should not be a principal goal of the pilot project. Council concurs with UCEP's reminder that "The pilot project was conceived to produce evidence that would convince appropriately skeptical faculty that courses delivered using new technological modalities can produce effective and efficient UC quality education. We should allow that process to produce its evidence, unhurried and unswayed by unjustified predictions or short cuts around the very existing processes that give UC Quality its meaning."

Council has serious reservations about the reconceived online pilot project as described in the March 24 UC Online Education Project Plan. The plan is significantly altered from its original intent to provide "25 online courses [that] will be developed and offered to UC students for credit" and its statement that "courses developed by this Project will be largely or wholly online and designed for UC undergraduates as regular academic year or summer session courses."² The announcement that UC would fund the project through a loan backed by commercial paper and other UC fund sources and would enroll large numbers of non-UC students to repay the loan has undermined the confidence of the faculty in the project. Council is deeply concerned about both the viability of the funding model, and the quality of the educational product. Indeed, by a majority of only one vote, Council rejected a motion that would have in effect recommended placing the project on hold with no further expenditures beyond fulfilling commitments to the faculty involved in the development of the first 29 courses until an independent market analysis demonstrates that this would be a good use of funds. Campus faculty and Senate committee members who responded in support of continuation of the project did so, for the most part, out of a sense of resignation that the project will be continued in any event. The debate at Council reflected a strong sentiment that in the current budgetary environment, it is not appropriate for the Office of the President to invest nearly \$7 million in this activity. (UCLA, UCORP)

² "The UC Online Instruction Pilot Project Request for Letters of intent from UC Academic Senate faculty," UCOP to Executive Vice Chancellors and Provosts memo, October 29, 2010, Appendix A, p. 6.

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Goals

Council believes that the initial goals of the project should be to improve the educational experience for UC students by increasing access to impacted courses, speeding time-to-degree, and evaluating whether online courses provide additional intellectual benefit or a more efficient delivery of a UC-quality education, rather than generating revenue from non-UC students (UCI, UCLA, UCEP, UCPB). Once the project is evaluated, and if it is deemed successful, then the University can begin to build an infrastructure to make the courses scalable and enroll non-UC students. In the current project plan, the target market seems to have shifted to non-UC students. Council believes the investment should be made first and foremost to serve UC students and that UC students should have priority access.

Resolution: *The Academic Council affirms support for continued development of online courses for UC students. The goal should be to maintain quality and improve access to undergraduate education.*

Resolution: *Council continues to recommend that the online project offered to UC students be limited to the initial set of 29 courses.*

Course Approval

Online courses must be approved through regular divisional Senate course review processes by course committees, and will be held to the same standards as traditional courses. Campus review must evaluate the instructional modality of online courses, as well as the intellectual content of the class. Courses may then be submitted to UCEP for approval as systemwide courses. UCEP will consider the suitability of a course for system-wide designation and assess whether the appropriate units are provided, whether on a semester or quarter system. Individual campus departments must determine whether a course will be accepted as credit for the major. Likewise, online courses must be taught by a qualified instructor of record approved by the department or academic unit responsible for the course. Senate course approval processes ensure quality. "It is because of these standards that UCOP is able to claim the excellence of UC education." (UCSB) Such safeguards of academic standards should not be portrayed as a "risk factor." (UCLA, UCSB, UCEP)

Resolution: *Online courses are subject to approval by courses committees at the divisional level. Once approved on a UC campus, online courses may be reviewed and approved as a University course by the University Committee on Educational Policy, under the review guidelines approved by that committee. The acceptance of an approved systemwide online course as a means of fulfilling the requirements for a degree or major shall be reviewed and approved by the agency that offers the degree or major.*

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Financial Model

Council has not had an opportunity to review the financial model developed for recovering the OP investment into online courses. The project plan does not include sufficient information to evaluate whether the proposed business model is realistic. The model depends on successfully attracting large numbers of non-UC students, but the prospectus presents no market data to show that this goal is feasible. Anticipated market research should be completed *before* expanding the project to non-UC students and the project strategy should be refined in response to this information. Moreover, many other providers already offer lower division courses, including established online for-profit courses, online AP courses, and remote education programs offered by a number of community colleges (UCD, UCI, UCLA, UCEP, UCPB). Given the competition, why would students choose UC's higher cost courses? (UCLA, UCR) Many Senate agencies question the use of scarce resources to fund the program. Some also object to the use of faculty and graduate students to teach non-UC students as a potential diversion of resources that could otherwise support existing programs that are struggling due to budget cuts (UCEP, UCPB). Others caution that borrowing is unwise and fear that if the plan fails, it will add to the University's structural deficit and therefore impact core programs (UCSB, UCORP).

Resolution: *The Academic Council requests that the administration provide UCPB with the financial model and consults with them regarding the market survey and milestones for evaluating the financial viability of the project.*

Resolution: *The Academic Council recommends that no funds be expended to develop a common technology platform until an independent market study of the online project determines that this is a wise use of funds.*

Resolution: *Should the market study affirm that a common platform is a sound investment, the Academic Council requests consultation with UCCC, UCEP, and UCPB, and a broad representation of faculty (not just those in the pilot program) to evaluate the responses to the RFP for a common learning platform.*

Qualifications/Success of Non-UC Students

The quality of UC students' educational experience must not be diminished by allowing non-UC students in online courses (UCSB, UCEP). Responsibility for assessing eligibility standards rests with the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) and the Committee on Educational Policy. Several divisions and committees pointed to research on the high rates of non-completion of online courses. Successful online endeavors often are due to the matriculation of motivated older adults (UCI, UCSB). The literature also demonstrates that less well-prepared students will require significant additional resources for support services (UCI, UCR, UCEP).

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Resolution: *Enrollment of non-UC students in online courses must be managed to avoid diminishing the quality of the educational experience for UC students who are enrolled in the same online courses.*

Resolution: *Eligibility standards for enrollment of non-UC students in credit-earning online courses must be established by the Academic Senate in order to ensure that enrolled students are qualified for the course.*

Timeline and Evaluation

The timeline set out in the project plan is unrealistic and contravenes the notion that this is a *pilot* program that will be evaluated, revised, and, if the evidence warrants it, expanded. As noted above, Council urges that the evaluation process be carried through to its conclusion and the results be carefully reviewed before taking additional steps to expand the program beyond UC students (UCD, UCI, UCR, UCSC, UCEP, UCORP). Council recommends that UCPB and UCEP review the progress of the pilot program.

Resolution: *UCPB and UCEP should be charged with the responsibility of reviewing the design of the evaluation and the progress and evaluation of the online program through all stages of the project. The Academic Council requests that the UC administration actively facilitate this review.*

Implementation Issues

As you know, the Senate is working with Academic Affairs to investigate common undergraduate major prerequisites across campuses, and to address other administrative implementation issues, such as the ease of transferring credit, the assignment of student contact hours, and the disposition of fees. Other issues include how instructional staff will be trained, mentored and supervised (UCSC, UCEP), and the impact on departmental teaching loads and faculty and GSI course assignments (UCI, UCR, UCSC). The online project must resolve whether enrollment targets are realistic given the current numbers of faculty and graduate students to teach them. (UCI)

Resolution: *The Academic Council requests that the UC administration consult with the Academic Senate to resolve issues of cost and revenue allocation, as well as the other implementation issues.*

Other Issues

- The ownership of intellectual property produced in the online project must be clarified. Several divisions and committees expressed concern about the requirement of the Next Generation Learning Challenges grant that the courses be open-access. The original RFP

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for letters of intent stated that faculty members would maintain copyright. (UCD, UCLA, UCSB, UCORP)

- A number of serious risk factors are not mentioned or adequately addressed, including the risk that the common learning platform may be more costly than anticipated and may pose compatibility challenges with existing course management systems; that due to the high costs of development and infrastructure, UC would not be able to recover much of its investment should the project fail; and that the courses may be less effective or more costly than hoped.
- Some respondents questioned whether UCOE will be a new administrative unit within UCOP. The extent of its authority needs to be clarified. The creation of an administrative entity must not supplant or circumvent the appropriate role of the Senate or department-based approval processes.
- Library support services must be addressed (UCI, UCSB, UCSC).
- Some suggested that UC should explore how the online pilot can serve graduate education (UCD) and that its competitive market advantage would be in offering upper division, rather than lower division, courses (UCLA).

In conclusion, I stress the Academic Council's continued support for the development of online courses with a goal of maintaining the quality of the University's educational programs. However, the Academic Council believes that the shift in funding model as described in the project plan has, indeed, altered the goals of the pilot project as a *pilot*. At the very least, the funding model has accelerated the goal of extending UC online courses to non-UC students precisely because the funding model *requires* large enrollments of non-UC students to generate the revenue to repay the loan. As the guarantors of UC quality, the Senate must be a full partner in developing and overseeing the fiscal, as well as the academic, aspects of the UC Online Education Project. As noted, we support the pursuit of innovative learning strategies and the goal of providing broader access to high-quality UC courses. We want to collaborate with you to ensure both that the project is a success, and that it does not negatively impact the quality of the education that we provide to our own students. We look forward to a closer working relationship with Academic Affairs on this project.

Sincerely,



Daniel L. Simmons

Chair, Academic Council

Copy: Academic Council Vice Chair Anderson
Members of the Academic Council