Davis Division Academic Senate

Request for Consultation Responses

Project Plan: UC Online Education (UCOE)

May 16, 2011

The Chair of the UC Academic Council has asked each Division to review the UC Online Education Project Plan and advise the Division of any comments, suggestions or concerns by May 18, 2011. On May 6, 2011, Academic Council letter to President Yudof was added to the document uploaded.
Courses of Instruction

May 17, 2011 8:09 AM

In general the membership of Committee on Courses of Instruction (CoCI) is supportive of the UC Online Education Project Plan but is very supportive of council’s call for “independent rigorous review” of the courses taught in the UC Online Education program.

We are most concerned that rather little funding is available, and the plan to finance the program through enrollment of students from outside of UC seems risky. In particular what is the mechanism for funds being transferred back to the program, and what are expected ratios of extension vs. regular enrollment students? What happens if the loan cannot be supported by the initial course offerings? Clearly the thinking about financing is sophisticated but it is still based on projections in a time of an uncertain economy. COCI suggests that a thorough cost-benefit analysis be completed to find if UC can afford the initiative at this time.

A significant concern with funding coming from non-UC students is how enrollments of UC students would be influenced by non-UC student enrollments in courses that have limited enrollments? Traditional course offerings at UC-Davis give priority to UC students, and then extension students are admitted depending on space-availability. If the bulk of the funding comes from students outside of UC how can this work for impacted courses?

The timeline for offering courses is unreasonable, with proposed first offerings of Summer and Fall 2011. A full review by CoCI would be needed. A minimum of 3-months is typically required to ensure proper review by all review committee levels including CoCI. It is not clear how review would function for courses coming from within UC-Davis, which are typically reviewed also by College courses committees. For non-UC-Davis courses how much review would be permitted by college courses committees? Times for review and approval of courses by college courses committees may vary. In addition, COCI’s policy and procedures, ICMS Curriculum (course approval system), and learning activities may need to be updated to reflect the structure of these courses. Currently, there are two learning activities set-up for online courses (WVL and WED). The descriptions for each of these learning activities will need to be updated to be more encompassing or additional learning activities will need to be added.

On the relevance of online courses to curricula, the committee shares the concern that the relevance of the courses to larger programs of study may not always be clear. This is less a concern for courses that are clearly online versions of existing introductory courses that are widely used in degree programs both within and outside of UC, but caution should be exercised when designing other courses that non-UC students might take with the hope of them being applicable to UC degree programs. Based on current roles of committees at UC-Davis, this seems like more of an issue to be visited by Undergraduate Council (that oversees degree programs) than for CoCI.

There is rather little in the document about two key issues that need special care in online course offerings, student workload in relation to units given, and methods of evaluation. How will the workload of courses be determined? Is there a plan to have a teaching assistant or reader work through course materials to determined time taken to complete exercises and read (watch etc.) course materials? All courses need to have a fair method of assigning letter grades (or pass or satisfactory), and there is a need to be sure that individuals performing tests and exercises are the enrolled student. Special care of these issues will be needed in seeking approval of courses.

Articulation with GE requirements at different campuses is not clear. Caution is needed here given the differences among campuses in the degree of development of GE offerings and procedures.

It is surprising that there is no UC-Davis member of the advisory group that is overseeing the success of the UCOE project, whereas there are two at UCI. Given that this is a UC-wide project, this seems surprising.
Despite the link being updated, the list of courses was still not available to review which courses are selected for offering by the UCOE project.
Elections, Rules & Jurisdiction

May 16, 2011 4:15 PM

No response at this time.
IMPACT ON GRADUATE EDUCATION:
There was some discussion about the inclusion of graduate education in this online initiative. The premise was that this could have two benefits. First, it might serve as a stopgap measure to cover graduate curricula as programs shrink. Second, it might make systemwide resources more readily available to graduate students (by more fully implementing Senate Regulation 544, which gives students the right to enroll simultaneously in a course or set of courses at their campus and another UC campus) and thus make UC more competitive with non UC programs.

The prospect of a greater need for TAs may potentially lead to greater graduate student support, but we are unsure that this project can benefit graduate education in any substantive way. Perhaps there will be more TA slots, but we cannot find any evidence that this would be the case. Furthermore, the loan from the UC is funding that could be used for graduate education or other more pressing university needs.

We note that the Plan as given separates the question of intercampus course offerings; however, for what it is worth, this is at odds with the 2009 Report of Special Senate Committee on Remote and Online Instruction and Residency. The question we pose is simply whether UCOP's (or "UCOE"s) decision to ignore the Senate recommendation is in the best interest of graduate education. It would seem that there are two potential benefits of improved technological and administrative mechanisms for intercampus graduate curriculum sharing: stopgap coverage as the university is defunded, and increased competitiveness with non-UC programs. The intercampus question could be taken up as a separate issue, of course, but our worry is that will mean graduate education will lose out on an opportunity to direct some of the $7m towards legitimate graduate educational needs. Perhaps the most useful battle line may not be whether or not to develop online education, but instead how to do so in ways that serve graduate education (and other legitimate curricular needs).

FINANCIAL PLAN:
The Plan is light on funding and revenue specifics and the copy we were given did not include "Appendix A" referred to in the text that would likely have offered some useful detail. The Plan does make this assertion (at the bottom of p. 4): "According to the pro forma, UCOE revenues will exceed expenditures in 2014/15 when 5,400 non-UC students enroll in an average of one four-unit course per year." Given the lack of detail, there was no way for APD to evaluate this claim.

The project regards large lower division undergraduate courses. There was some concern that we already have more undergraduate demand than we can meet (online or off) calling into question the whole premise of reaching out to international students and others with online courses. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, there are already many competing institutions offering such courses. It is an open question as to whether or not UC will be able to charge as much for these courses as is envisioned and obtain the projected enrollments, given the competition in the marketplace. We have not been given enough information to make any assessment of whether the proposed business model is viable. The claim that they will be bringing money in three years may well be unfounded. As many have said, the changing/unstable UCOE business model is very worrisome—market competition, differing outputs required by investors/lenders/funding agencies, etc..

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY:
There was some concern about the efficacy of online education generally, about the hiring of private companies to administer the program, and about intellectual property issues. The proposal involves a loan of up to $6,900,000 from UC. Only $748,000 in outside funding has been obtained (Gates Foundations), and this funding is contingent on the course material being made freely available for others to use. Considering that about 20 course proposals have been approved, should UC be willing to sell intellectual content for $37,400 per course?
CPB has discussed the UCOP online education pilot program. We endorse the May 6th letter from Dan Simmons and its recommendations. In addition, CPB wishes to note that the cost and difficulty of establishing this program were greatly underestimated. Issues still remain such as:

- Has it been determined how such courses will be accepted on the individual campuses? If an online course from one campus is approved system-wide, will the student’s major accept such a class to satisfy the major requirements?
- How will GE requirements be handled? Will reciprocity agreements be required?
- How will online courses affect residency?
- How will TA’s and TA support be assigned?
- Does the business model for the online pilot to break even require that the instructors agree to teach the course repeatedly? Have not only the instructors, but also the department chairs who assign their teaching agreed to this? Will the courses be considered part of their normal teaching assign.

Such details seem minor but are important for a functioning, robust online program.
No response at this time.
Research - Policy

May 16, 2011 4:16 PM

No response at this time.
Undergraduate Council

May 18, 2011 9:55 AM

Undergraduate Council has reviewed and discussed the UCOP online education pilot program, and the recommendations in the letter from Academic Council Chair Dan Simmons. Undergraduate Council strongly endorses the letter from Chair Simmons.