

Responses to Questions Posed by the Little Hoover Commission

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- **The development of UC Online;**

UC Online Education (UCOE) is a systemwide project that is helping to develop 35 courses involving each of the 9 UC undergraduate campuses. The courses are developed by faculty from a given campus with aid from an instructional designer, and they go through the course review process at the campus as do any courses. The faculty review process is the means by which UC ensures that the courses offered online meet UC's desired standards for quality. Online courses are developed using a variety of innovative learning technologies, are highly interactive with content, between students, and with instructors, and students get mentoring, feedback and grading from course instructors. After being offered at least once to UC students on the home campus, and following approval by the systemwide educational policy committee, a course can be offered to non-UC student who can earn UC credit that can be transferred to most institutions.

This systemwide effort parallels similar development efforts funded and overseen through local campus processes. Systemwide there are approximately 116 undergraduate courses currently offered online, and efforts are underway to streamline a process that would enable students to enroll in online courses offered from a different campus than their home campus. In addition to the undergraduate online classes there are approximately 110 graduate level classes available online and three online masters programs, with several more awaiting approval. UC will be holding an all-campus meeting this spring to more strategically plan how to increase, facilitate and coordinate offerings throughout the system.

- **UC's efforts to use UC Online or other online education models to develop high-demand gateway or bottle-neck courses;**

Development of courses for UCOE has focused on high enrollment gateway and general education (GE) undergraduate courses, though the initial set of courses developed included a more diverse set of courses in order to evaluate a variety of course design modes across a diverse set of disciplines. A process is underway to make such courses more readily available for enrollment of students across UC campuses, and to investigate how the courses could benefit students at community colleges or aspiring to enroll eventually at UC. Current planning efforts are also targeting similar gateway and GE courses, with one of the goals of the developing curriculum to provide students with online options if they are not able to get into a key course on their campus when they need to, to provide them with more flexibility in their schedules to accommodate work and family obligations, and to provide an alternative learning mode for those who may benefit from a more diverse set of learning modes. An expected outcome of this is that it will facilitate students progress toward graduation and can help reduce the already very good time-to-degree.

- **The role MOOCs will play in online education at UC;**

A number of UC campuses have made partnerships with MOOCs. These courses are offered through the MOOCs and not through UC, and thus do not carry UC credit. We will be investigating how MOOC development platforms might be incorporated into a model that would include appropriate identity management and instructor involvement to see if courses that meet UC standards can be developed at a lower cost by taking advantage of the technologies and scalability offered by MOOCs.

- **Faculty support for online education, including UC Online, MOOCs or other online educational models;**

Faculty are supportive of online education as long as the courses developed for UC credit meet or exceed the standards expected of any course offered at UC. A variety of learning technologies have been

used in UC courses for many years, including fully online courses and much greater numbers of hybrid courses that blend online learning modes with traditional course formats. Faculty have been supportive of the education goals of UCOE but also critical of the funding structure and process used to initiate the program. Current planning efforts underway toward increasing the number of online options available to students will be largely driven by the involvement of faculty from a variety of perspectives within UC.

- **Awarding credit to students who take MOOC courses;**

The guidelines for approval of course credit taken elsewhere for use toward requirements for a UC degree are determined by the faculty senate. Admission officers evaluating courses for transfer credit follow senate guidelines for whether units can count toward degree requirements, and approval for major or GE requirements is done at the departmental or college level on each campus. The senate will likely apply the same guidelines to MOOC courses carrying credit that they do for any course submitted for credit. Because of the evolving process by which MOOCs might get credit this will likely involve some evolution in that review process as well.

- **Whether online educational initiatives such as UC Online can help increase student access to classes, cut the time to degree and increase the number of graduates;**

UC believes online courses can be a benefit to students in a variety of ways, including reducing the time to degree and increasing already high graduation rates. Students will have more flexibility in scheduling with online courses and that hopefully will help reduce courses that might currently be bottlenecks to desired progression toward a degree. The ability to enroll in online courses across campuses and an accompanying facilitation of the approval process for major and GE credit will also increase the variety of courses a student might take to meet requirements. Elective courses not available on a student's home campus might be available online from another campus, and courses that might not be supportable due to low enrollments and given current funding resources might be sustainable when populated with students from across the UC campuses.

- **The role UC Online and online education in general can play in containing costs and increasing affordability for students attending a UC campus;**

Using online course options to minimize impediments to normal progress through a degree program inherently brings benefits to both the student and the institution. If students can graduate a term earlier they save the expenses from that extra term. That would also open an enrollment slot for another student, allowing UC to enroll more students in a given time period with potentially lower or equivalent costs.

Ensuring that the quality of curricular offerings is maintained for both online and traditional course formats is central to UCs efforts to further enhance online opportunities. A variety of online models that might reduce instructional costs while still maintaining quality will be explored. This might involve use of MOOC technology to develop courses at lower costs, might allow more students to be taught in an online format compared to a similar course taught in the traditional manner, might include online courses developed for systemwide use but involving local campus instructors, or a variety of other options. Evaluation of initial efforts will need to be planned carefully to ensure success in meeting learning objectives while also measuring costs and instructor workload.

- **Other issues concerning the current support for increasing the use of online learning in higher education.**

UC will also be investigating longer term benefits that could come by exploring how online development efforts might be utilized by other higher education segments in California. Additionally, UC is participating in a coordinated effort by the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU) to develop a consortium of universities that will enable collaborative and cost-saving approaches to developing or licensing interactive on-line and hybrid learning systems and course content.