April 3, 2013

Scott Waugh
Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

Re: Senate Review of the Draft Online Course Policy

Dear Scott,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Draft Online Course Policy. Upon receipt of the draft, I requested review by the Undergraduate Council, Graduate Council, Committee on Instruction and Technology, the Committee on Library and Scholarly Communication, the Committee on Community and Continuing Education, and all Faculty Executive Committees. Those responses are online and can be accessed by clicking on this sentence. The Executive Board, which speaks for the division on such matters, reviewed the draft policy and all responses. This letter serves as the response for the Academic Senate. Additionally, a Senate draft policy for online education is underway, which will be helpful in shaping procedures and policy.

The Executive Board appreciates the effort that went into formulating this draft policy. However, there was a broad consensus that the faculty could not support the policy as written. A recurring theme in the concerns about the document arose from blurring of responsibilities between the Senate and the administration. Our concerns can be categorized into five general topics: (1) policy related to curriculum (2) evaluation, (3) admissions, (4) the structure and focus of the proposed online center, and (5) financial compensation for and intellectual property concerns regarding courses. I have amplified these concerns and activities that are occurring in the Senate to help resolve these issues.

1. **Policy Regarding Curriculum.** Any campus policy on online courses must clearly articulate the role of the Academic Senate in approving and evaluating courses and curriculum. As written, the draft policy is ambiguous in this regard because it conflates curricular and budgetary authority. The proposed policy seems to suggest that if the Senate and the relevant dean approve a course to be delivered on-line, course development could be prohibited by a central administrative authority. This is based on the presumption that all resources will be centrally held. The policy seems to exclude the possibility that departments or individual faculty may have adequate resources to support course development without “extraordinary resources” from the central administration. A more appropriate strategy, and one consistent with existing practices, would be to have the individual or program that requires substantial funding to create online offerings to include in its proposal for Senate approval evidence that such support is available and adequate, whether from a donor, a dean, summer sessions, or some other UCLA or non-UCLA funding source.

Such a strategy would address another recurring concern with the report. UCLA faculty have a long tradition of innovative and effective instruction. Many were concerned that this additional layer of review beyond the existing Senate structure and one that put funding in such a central focus (see #5 below) would be a barrier to the innovation that has already transformed many UCLA classrooms and learning experiences by the imaginative use of technology.

Additionally, by focusing heavily on courses that require “exceptional university resources”, the report runs the possibility of letting the “tail wag the dog.” UCLA’s
challenge, like those of other universities of its stature, is to keep its focus on offering a superior education of the kind that is best offered at a research institution. It is critical that any policy have as its central focus the recognition that the great majority of our courses will not be fully online and the resources as well as the infrastructure needed to make them the building blocks of a 21st century learning environment.

2. **Evaluation:** A critical aspect of the Senate’s responsibility for UCLA’s curriculum is the importance of evaluating both undergraduate and graduate programs. The introduction of new technologies and delivery systems makes this evaluation critically important from two perspectives. The first is the evaluation of the effectiveness of online courses themselves. It is important that UCLA understand as quickly as possible whether these new technologies are a) achieving the learning goals they were designed to meet in particular classes and b) serving students as effectively as equivalent courses as students move forward in their education. The second involves developing strategies that allow the campus to integrate successful pedagogical insights learned from designing and teaching online courses into other campus courses and programs.

The College FEC strongly supports the role of the Senate in the “expansion of technology.” We have been working on principles related to online education in the Committee on Instruction and Technology and hope that these will be helpful in guiding the development and evaluation of courses. The Undergraduate and Graduate Councils have been working on guidelines for the vetting and evaluation of courses with expanded use of technology. We recognize that the role and preparation of teaching assistants also requires further articulation at all levels.

3. **Admissions:** With regard to admissions, it is clearly the purview of the Academic Senate—through the Graduate and Undergraduate Councils and the Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Relations with Schools—to set the standards for admission to UCLA. The enrollment of matriculated and non-matriculated students in the same on-line courses could have profound and far-reaching implications for the quality of instruction on our campus, potentially diverting time and attention of faculty as well as university resources from our core mission. We recognize that there may be compelling pedagogical, political, and fiscal reasons to augment our traditional mix of students with a new population that is wholly or largely taught on-line (including through MOOCs, for example). We would propose to collaborate with you in the development of new programs that can be guided by standards for admission set by the Senate. Alternate pathways for admission might be developed along the lines of the UNEX model, with special attention to the need to maintain our focus on matriculated students.

4. **Structure and Mandate of the Proposed Online Center.** The majority of the various committees and the Executive Board viewed an online center as positive if its primary goal is to be facilitative, not regulatory. The nature of its mandate is not clear in the current document. If the center has the authority to determine which online courses are produced, irrespective of budgetary authority, it in essence holds veto power over the Academic Senate and the deans. Although judgment will need to be applied in determining which courses should be produced and in what online formats, such decisions are rightly the purview of the academic dean, with the advice of the faculty, especially as these are part of academic programs and not simply stand alone courses. Moreover, providing support for such aspects as high quality and standardized online visuals, ADA compliance, etc.,—which would be much appreciated by the faculty—should be viewed as a service of the center, not as a final regulatory authority. Viewed as a service, this has the potential to provide a powerful incentive for faculty to develop online courses with the center or in conjunction with it and existing support centers elsewhere on campus.

However, some faculty, including the Council on Planning and Budget, expressed concerns about the need for a new administrative construct and the additional resources
that would be required to support it. There was generally agreement, however, that the current Office of Instructional Development could be better positioned outside of the College (to support courses across the entire campus), and have its purview expanded to include assistance with graduate level courses. The College FEC supports the concept of an online clearinghouse, and many reviewing committees acknowledged the need for some central strategic planning for on-line courses to relieve overcrowding and increase availability of gateway courses. We are very concerned, however, that the structure proposed in this report seriously overreaches in what is necessary or would be helpful. The Senate would be happy to be involved in future discussions about support for instructional technology and our online summit might be a springboard for these efforts.

5. **Financial and Intellectual Property Concerns.** However the budget is eventually structured to support creative and innovative technological endeavors in the classroom, we hope that the rules will facilitate, not hinder, such development. There was considerable confusion about the interpretation of the term “use of exceptional university resources”. The current draft policy appears to strip faculty of their intellectual property rights for online courses above a certain cost threshold, and indeed, might be a great impediment to faculty participation in online education. Moreover, it marks a departure from agreements already in place with faculty who have taken the lead in developing online courses. Members were puzzled, for example, as to why a structure wasn’t proposed whereby the faculty retain intellectual property rights, but license the course to UCLA for a period of time, during which the campus would recoup its investment.

The implications of use of non-UC faculty in commissioned course development need to be addressed from both a pedagogical as well as financial perspective. There also was concern about the impact of the IP policy on the library, digitized resources, and existing videos of lectures. The issue of compensation becomes complicated if this policy will cover faculty in MOOCs as “outside professional activity”. There are a variety of Senate committees that might be helpful in developing these policies including the Committee on Academic Freedom, Committee on Library and Scholarly Communication, and Undergraduate and Graduate Councils.

We believe that the Task Force report was helpful in identifying and discussing a complex set of issues arising from an expanded online curriculum and teaching environment. In view of the range of concerns and different pathways for resolution, we would not recommend re-convening the Task Force, but instead recommend working through the existing committees and structures of the Senate and the administration to address these issues. We hope that our responses here and the forthcoming conference will help UCLA create online course policies and structures that will enhance the learning experiences of our students and the reputation of UCLA as an educational innovator. We look forward to working with you on these.

Sincerely,

Linda Sarna
Chair, Academic Senate

Cc: Maryann Gray, Assistant Provost
Jaime Balboa, Academic Senate CAO