Council Resolution 08 (CR08): Recommendations for UC Online Education Policy

WHEREAS, Governor Brown has tied a portion of UC state funding to "increasing access to high demand courses for UC undergraduates" through the Innovative Learning Technology Initiative (ILTI), which "will help UC graduates get the courses they need when they need them, satisfy degree requirements, and graduate in a timely manner"[1];

WHEREAS, the UC has responded to the governor's plan by creating and promoting the UC Cross-Campus Enrollment system [2];

WHEREAS, peer-reviewed research shows that asynchronous online courses may not be effective for students enrolled in general education or pre-requisite major courses during the early years of their undergraduate programs;

WHEREAS, peer-reviewed research shows that student success in online courses requires active and encouraging faculty presence, the creation of a virtual community, and significant levels of faculty feedback [4];

WHEREAS, at UC San Diego these functions are most often performed by teaching assistants (TAs as defined by the academic senate), under the supervision and mentorship of tenure-line professors, in large undergraduate lecture courses;

WHEREAS, data concerning online classes and distance education offered at California Community Colleges show that students surveyed in California who indicated that they liked online learning are successful, but students who indicated a dislike for online learning are not [5];

WHEREAS, the California Community College data further show that most students enrolled in the system's online courses are white women aged 18-24 and that completion rates for all students in online courses are only 60% compared to 69% completion rates in traditional courses and that completion rates for younger students are lower (59% for 18-19 year olds, 57% for 20-24 year olds), as are completion rates for underrepresented minorities (44% for Blacks, 53% for Hispanics, and 54% for Native Americans) and males (57%)[6];

WHEREAS, the California Community College 2013 report clearly states: "If the student is not one of those particularly well prepared for college-level work and not an especially motivated beginning student, online courses early in the college experience may not be advised"[7];

WHEREAS, these statistics show that expanding online courses at UC San Diego could exacerbate issues related to diversity on campus;

WHEREAS, students who fail and repeat online learning courses in the California Community Colleges cost the State of California and themselves millions of dollars a year due to re-enrollment[8];

WHEREAS, the California Community Colleges have further found that faculty must be trained in facilitating online courses to maintain academic standards and integrity and to improve student success[9];

WHEREAS, title 5 of the California Code of Regulations for distance education requires significant faculty-student interaction[10];

WHEREAS, in traditional undergraduate courses much of the faculty-student interaction is provided by TAs at UC San Diego, and these TAs are supervised and mentored by the tenure-line professors lecturing in the course, as part of the TAs' professional training for academic careers;

WHEREAS, many of UC San Diego's online courses are currently hosted on Coursera, which only requires faculty to answer Q&A on class discussion boards for the first year and which provides tutoring to students (for a fee) under the company monetization model, while making no mention of faculty-student interaction for other monetization models[11];

WHEREAS, Coursera also promotes faculty use of "flipped classrooms" (hybrid courses) that depend greatly on the charisma of the professor and that have been questioned by students in other universities[12];

WHEREAS, the UC Students Association unanimously passed a vote of no confidence against Governor Brown, in part, because of his attempts to save money by increasing online courses instead of increasing state support of the UC[13];

WHEREAS, the UC San Diego Committee on Planning and Budget has expressed concerns about the use of TAs in massive open online courses (MOOCs) and has called for a campus policy on TA involvement with online education at UCSD[14];

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that GSAUCSD supports the UCSA in calling on Governor Brown to increase funding to the UC system instead of relying on online education to cut costs;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that GSAUCSD requests the campus Vice Chancellor of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to thoroughly vet all proposals for moving sections of general education and pre-requisite major courses online to ensure that underrepresented populations in the UC San Diego community are not harmed by such actions;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that GSAUCSD requests the UC San Diego Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs develop TA training courses for any TAs who may be assigned sections as part of an online or hybrid course;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that UC San Diego should develop and implement a campus policy ensuring that no TAs lead campus sections for an online or hybrid MOOC without appropriate supervision from a faculty member, who is an employee of UC San Diego and working on campus when the course is being taught here;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that UC San Diego should develop and implement a campus policy ensuring that faculty members using the "flipped classroom" model must also be responsible for the in-person critical learning sessions and that TAs would only be responsible for review work, per their job description;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that UC San Diego should develop and implement a campus policy ensuring that no paid tutors from an online platform provider be allowed to replace TA work opportunities for sections of an online course, in every year that the course is offered;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that UC San Diego should develop and implement a campus policy ensuring that any TAs working as support staff for a MOOC, online or hybrid course be classified as Academic Student Employees of UC San Diego covered by the collective bargaining agreement, and receive the same compensation and benefits as TAs in traditional courses;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the TA union, UAW Local #2865, should be informed of this situation and requested to monitor the use of MOOCs or online and hybrid courses with respect to TA employment, in order to prevent violations of the collective bargaining agreement;

THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that GSAUCSD council instructs its executive officers to provide copies of this resolution to UCSA; to the UCSD Vice Chancellor of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; to the UCSD Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs; to the Chair of the UCSD Academic Senate; and to the Unit Chair of the UCSD Chapter of UAW Local #2865.

Voted and Passed in GSA Council Meeting 14: 5/18/2015 (Y/N/A – 32/0/1)
Certified: Jonathan M. Monk, 5/29/2015

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[1] http://www.dof.ca.gov/documents/FullBudgetSummary2013-14.pdf
[2] http://crossenroll.universityofcalifornia.edu/index.html
[3] Bunn 2004; Dupin-Bryant 2004; Levy 2007; Holder 2007; Ivankova & Stick 2007; Muller 2008; Nash 2005; Stanford-Bowers 2008; Sullivan 2001
[4] Ivankova & Stick 2007; Keep 2002; Liu, Gomez & Yen 2009; Muller 2008; Bunn 2004; Holder 2007; Park & Choi 2009
[5] Distance Education 2013, p. 2
[6] Distance Education 2013, Appendices
[7] Distance Education 2013, p. 23
[8] Distance Education 2013, p. 22
[9] Distance Education 2013, p. 4
[10] California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 55204 Instructor Contact (a) (b)
[11] Coursera-UCSD Contract 2015
[12]
http://www.stanforddaily.com/2013/02/15/students-question-whether-classes-are-using-coursera-effectively/;
http://www.dukechronicle.com/articles/2013/03/05/duke-students-use-coursera-flipped-classroom#.VL73e0fF-iE
[13]
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByaYIydsZ0GzelJYRmg0b2taU3lzWlp3LXVxUWo5QThsNW1R/view;
http://www.dailycal.org/2015/02/09/uc-student-association-passes-no-confidence-resolution-gov-jerry-brown/
[14] Letter from CPB to President of UCSD Academic Senate dated 1/30/2015