UC Online Education: Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT IS UC ONLINE EDUCATION?

UC Online Education serves UC students with high-caliber, credit-bearing undergraduate courses. The program aims to provide more flexibility for student learning, while increasing access to the high-demand, gateway courses students need to progress toward their degree.

Through innovative use of technology and a high-degree of student-instructor interaction, UCOE is focused on creating online courses that match the academic rigor of what is possible in the classroom. It has built a technical and course design infrastructure that can increase UC’s capacity for online education across the system.

Since its inaugural class – a pre-calculus course at UC Merced – was offered in January 2012, UC Online has launched a total of 14 courses, several of which have been offered multiple times, and enrolled 1,700 UC students. More classes will be offered in the winter and spring of 2013, with approximately 20 new courses expected by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

In addition to serving UC students, the program also enables non-matriculated students to enroll in select classes for transferable course credit at a fee equivalent to the per-unit rate of in-state tuition (ranging from $1,400 to $2,100 per class. For more information, see www.uconline.edu.)

The following courses have been offered through the program:

- Preparatory calculus (Merced)
- Politics and strategy (Los Angeles)
- Global climate change (Davis)
- Fresh water policy (Santa Cruz)
- Diversity, disagreement and democracy (Los Angeles)
- Art, science and technology (Los Angeles)
- Classical physics (Irvine)
- Pre-calculus (1A) (Irvine)
- Pre-calculus (1B) (Irvine)
- Preparation for general chemistry (Irvine)
- Introduction to information (Berkeley)
- Beauty and joy of computing (Berkeley)
- Maps and spatial reasoning (Santa Barbara)
- Dance: cultures and contexts (Riverside)
HOW IS THE PROGRAM EVALUATED?

Quality is paramount to the UCOE program. It employs a number of means to ensure that its online courses are the scholarly equivalents of regular, on-the-ground UC courses.

- To be approved for the UC curriculum, courses undergo extensive institutional and peer review, in many cases exceeding that required for face-to-face instruction.
- The courses maintain strong instructor and teaching assistant support, and facilitate a high degree of interaction between the student, instructor and fellow classmates. Classes include instructor-led discussions, online office hours, active feedback and other features to promote academic interaction.
- The courses are created and driven by faculty. They bring their expertise and vision for how they want to teach the course and work with dedicated UCOE instructional designers to bring that vision to reality.
- Courses use technology creatively to enable new approaches to teaching and learning, through features such as video analysis, multi-player gaming, elaborate simulations, creation of multimedia work, shared writing, online dialogue and debate, and more.

The program also includes an extensive evaluation component run through the UC Educational Evaluation Center (UCEC) at UC Santa Barbara. Researchers are gathering data on how various approaches are working, which will be used to inform the development of new courses and improvement of existing ones.

Early evaluation results showed a positive response from students and faculty:

- More than 70 percent of students reported they would take another online course and would recommend the experience to other students.
- 84 percent agreed courses had a high-quality curriculum.

HOW IS THE ONLINE PROJECT FUNDED?

The project was financed with a $6.9 million, interest-free loan made by the UC Office of the President from a program that encourages system-wide efficiencies. In addition, the program received a $750,000 grant from Next Generation Learning Challenges.

The vast majority of start-up funding has been directed toward course creation and development of technological and other infrastructure needed to deliver online instruction. As part of this, UC contracted an outside vendor, Blackboard Services, to provide some technical and student support. About 25 percent of the contract funding (or 14 percent of the total loan funding) has gone toward exploring and developing the market for non-UC students.
UC Online Education continues to explore potential means to make the program financially self-sustaining. The priority for the program, however, is serving UC students by improving access and flexibility rather than making profits.

**WHAT ROLE DO NON-UC STUDENTS PLAY?**

The program’s initial business model called for funding the program largely through revenues from non-UC students, who may pay a fee to take select courses for transferable UC credit. Since then, the landscape of online education has changed dramatically, in particular with the proliferation of free, non-credit bearing courses.

UC Online Education is continuing to explore the market for non-UC students, and to evaluate how this fits into the program’s business model. The program is also assessing other long-term financial models, including serving as a service provider to UC campuses and departments that want to develop online offerings.

**WHAT ABOUT MOOCS?**

Several UC campuses have participated actively with organizations such as edX and Coursera to develop massive open online courses (MOOCs) — free, non-credit bearing courses open to all who enroll. These efforts are distinct from the courses developed through UC Online Education in a number of ways. UC-developed MOOCs, for example, do not carry course credit and do not currently enable students to progress toward a degree.

While UCOE is exploring how it can work with campus MOOC partnerships already underway, the program has chosen to focus on directly serving UC students with credit-bearing, online classes that can meet a rising demand for the lower-division courses students need to progress in their studies. In addition, UCOE courses support a high level of faculty-student interaction that has thus far not been possible on the scale of the MOOCs. And, as credit-bearing courses, they are held to different standards for academic integrity, content, and evaluation and verification of student work.

**WHAT ARE THE PROJECT’S FUTURE GOALS?**

UC Online Education is just one part of the overall online education strategy at the University of California, which includes efforts underway at individual campuses that range from fully online masters degrees to massive open online courses (or MOOCs). (For more information, see the Jan. 16, 2013, Report to the Regents: [Online Education at the University of California](#).)
Altogether, more than 2,500 online courses in the 2011-2012 school year across the UC system, with more than 90,000 enrollments.

UC campus faculty have offered or will soon offer 21 MOOCs with Coursera, edX and Udacity. UC Berkeley, UC Irvine and UC San Francisco have partnerships with MOOCs and other campuses are exploring this option.

All 10 campuses have completed or are developing strategic plans for online education.

Eight campuses have established committees to evaluate, facilitate and support online education.

UC officials have cited the potential of high-caliber online education to help the UC system meet a growing need for capacity in lower-division, gateway courses. UC President Mark G. Yudof has called for a working group in the spring of 2013 to identify and develop the courses needed to allow every UC student the opportunity to take online courses as part of their undergraduate education.

Over the next year, UCOE is focused on collaborating with the campuses to expand the catalog of courses available – both by developing new courses and by incorporating qualified summer and extension programs into one central catalog of online offerings.

In addition, by fall of 2013, the university has pledged to establish a rudimentary infrastructure that will enable students on any campus to easily enroll in any online course across the system.

Looking further ahead, the UC will explore the feasibility of using its online course material to prepare students transferring from community colleges and – potentially – to assist UC in maintaining the capacity to guarantee enrollment to all California residents who meet UC eligibility criteria.