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February 23, 2012

BARRY KEENE, CHAIR  
CALIFORNIA STUDENT AID COMMISSION

Dear Mr. Keene:

I deeply regret that I was not able to appear in person to deliver my statement to the Commission this afternoon. Unfortunately, both I and my vice chair had previous commitments for today that required travel. However, I appreciate the opportunity to offer University of California faculty perspectives on distance learning, and I am pleased to submit the written remarks I would have delivered in person had I been able to attend the hearing.

Please feel free to contact my office if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Anderson".

Robert M. Anderson

Encl (1)

Cc: Council Vice Chair Powell  
Associate Vice President Juarez  
Executive Director Winnacker

**ROBERT M. ANDERSON  
CHAIR, ASSEMBLY OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE  
PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS & MATHEMATICS (BERKELEY)  
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## **DISTANCE LEARNING FROM A FACULTY PERSPECTIVE**

**REMARKS PREPARED FOR THE PUBLIC HEARING  
OF THE  
CALIFORNIA STUDENT AID COMMISSION  
FEBRUARY 23, 2012**

Thank you for this opportunity to share with the Commission some University of California faculty perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of distance learning.

As faculty members at UC, we begin with two fundamental assumptions about teaching: (1) UC students are academically well prepared and have chosen to attend a research university; and (2) our responsibility as their teachers is to convey knowledge and analytical skills in a manner that fosters their independence and capability to reason, arouses curiosity in beginning students, stimulates advanced students to creative work, and instills high standards of critical thinking.

Our teaching must convey information that encompasses new understandings that arise from the research we are conducting at the same time that we teach. We must teach ways of testing and creating knowledge, including such “soft” skills as careful reading and logical analysis and such “methods” skills as laboratory experimentation, statistical analysis, and field work. And we must assess whether our students are learning what they need to know.

Over the centuries, we have developed familiar ways of accomplishing these tasks. Some of these are lectures, intense facilitated discussions in seminars, writing assignments, mathematical problem sets, supervised practice in laboratories and field-based data collection. All of these teaching practices involve personal interaction between teachers and students. Even in giant lecture halls, students ask questions that allow them to watch us think out loud as we grapple with a perspective we hadn't thought of before. And they visit us in our offices to pursue topics in greater depth and establish personal relationships. We also provide more intimate settings with teaching assistants who work with students in smaller groups to process and grapple with what they have learned in a lecture.

Distance learning is a relatively new venue for us, but “distanceness” does not change the basic nature of our teaching responsibilities. Nor can it change our expectation that our students will be academically well prepared. For UC to carry out its distinctive mission as the state's selective-admission research university, we must be able to maintain consistent performance standards in distance and

face-to-face learning so that any student enrolled in a UC class is receiving a UC education, not a watered-down imitation.

“Distanceness” challenges us to find ways to port the key elements of our teaching and our students’ learning into an environment in which we may not have any face-to-face contact. We take this challenge seriously enough that we created a special committee two years ago to study in depth “remote and online education” in the University of California context. My remarks today draw on some of its findings as well as on recent experiences.

Our starting point is that both teaching and academic performance standards must be consistent in distance and face-to-face learning environments. We have identified some specific ways in which our courses committees need to examine proposals to create a distance learning course – whether it is a new version of an existing class or a new class altogether:

- Is the faculty member who proposes to teach in a distance format knowledgeable about the technologies that he or she proposes to use? Is training and support available to assist him or her to construct a course that uses the technologies effectively?
- Is there a clear and compelling rationale for choosing the primary instructional methods and materials in the distance context? For example, are video lectures a useful way of conveying information on the course subject? Or would some form of logical puzzle solving or game playing be more effective?
- Are the proposed assessment tools (exams and assignments) both fair and unlikely to be compromised by academic dishonesty (cheating)? For example, how will exams be proctored? How will students prove that they completed their written assignments rather than compiling them from Wikipedia and Youtube?
- How will instructor and students interact? Are the proposed interaction methods likely to be successful? For example, will the instructor hold live discussion sessions by video or teleconference? Will communication be primarily through email? Live chat? How will the instructor ensure that a student who asks a question understands the instructor’s answer?
- How will students interact with each other? Are the proposed interaction methods likely to be successful? For example, how will the instructor facilitate student discussion in ways that encourage students to test ideas without fear of ridicule or bullying? How will the instructor ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in discussions?
- Are appropriate channels available for student feedback to the instructor and the sponsoring academic department?
- Is adequate technical support available for both students and faculty? Is the required technology accessible to students with limited financial resources? With disabilities?
- Are the necessary class materials available to all students? Are enough library resources available to allow students to complete independent projects for the course?

- Does the proposal fully recognize the amount of faculty time that will be required to develop, train for, and deliver the proposed course or program?

UC faculty believe that distance learning offers opportunities to enhance the curriculum for campus-based students and potentially to realize some cost savings. However, we do not anticipate that we will create an all-distance curriculum. Distance learning is still a very small component of UC undergraduate education, even though many of our students take courses that include online elements.

In the next panel, you will hear about UC's Online Instruction Pilot Program. I believe you will hear about how much time and enthusiasm the participating faculty bring to the project. And you will hear about plans to offer these courses to students who are not matriculated at UC. We as faculty are grappling with how to ensure that these non-UC students are able to perform at the same academic standards as UC students so that we can be sure that they experience actual UC courses and that the UC students in those courses are not deprived of the UC instruction they expect.

Over the past five or six years, UC has launched several online-only graduate professional degree programs, and more are in the pipeline now. University Extension has also been offering online distance learning opportunities to significant numbers of adult students over the past decade-plus. This pattern is similar to those of other research universities and does not directly affect the undergraduate learning experience.

Finally, we believe it is appropriate to the UC mission that we should incorporate distance elements that enrich teaching and learning opportunities in an undergraduate education that is grounded in on-campus experience. The greatest advantage that distance learning offers to UC students is the opportunity to take courses offered at other UC locations without physically relocating. We also anticipate some opportunities for cost savings, but we think these will be evident only after substantial upfront investment.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share the UC faculty perspective.