Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

<u>**DISCUSSION ITEM**</u>

For Meeting of January 24, 2024

UC ONLINE AND THE ECOSYSTEM OF ONLINE EDUCATION IN THE UC SYSTEM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This discussion item provides an overview of the University's role in strategizing and supporting online education: the history of systemwide support of online education from the Office of the President (first as the Innovative Learning Technology Initiative and now as UC Online), the existing and historical actions of UC Online support, changes to the structure and strategy of UC Online post-pandemic, and the strategic role of UC Online in supporting the future vision of the University and its campuses for teaching and learning online.

BACKGROUND

The University of California system has engaged in online education for more than 50 years. The earliest examples were research-to-practice initiatives such as the NSF-funded National Language Processing project out of UC Irvine in the early 1970s and the Intercultural Learning Network out of UC San Diego in the mid-1980s. University extension programs began to offer online courses in the 1990s, and today there are more than 3,000 online courses available online through UC Extension, with more than 100,000 people taking an online Extension course in 2022–23. The first online professional graduate programs began enrolling students in the early 2000s, and today there are 28 distinct fully online graduate programs across seven of the UC campuses, with many more offering significant course time in an online modality, either as hybrid or technology-embedded programs.

Development Phase: Creation of the Innovative Learning Technology Initiative (2013–2022)

Efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy for online education as a mechanism to support system goals date back nearly 20 years. In 2010, the Report of the Commission on the Future recognized the necessity of a systemwide mechanism to support campus work on initiatives that would support online learning courses, student ecosystems, transfer processes, degree programs and more. From that call to action came several initiatives to foster and develop capacity for and agreement on greater online education opportunities, but it was Governor Jerry Brown's 2013 budget allocation that resulted in the creation of the Innovative Learning Technology Initiative

(ILTI), the precursor to today's UC Online, at the UC Office of the President. At that time, the areas identified for ILTI to focus their efforts were:

Spearheading an initiative for degree-seeking students to utilize online courses across the system to support time-to-degree and other educational objectives

During the 2013–14 academic year, ILTI launched the University of California Cross-Campus Enrollment System (CCES), a nexus for students across the UC system to register to take online courses within the system but beyond their home campus. Students engage through a web portal to search and sign up for courses, and the back-end development of the system integrates campus workflows and technological data exchanges with a central Student Information System (SIS). The CCES automates much of the process for students to register for courses (sending enrollments to campuses hosting the courses and returning grades through the system to the student's home campus), and UC Online has established workflows across the system for elements requiring more human interaction, such as securing home campus approval from academic advisors and registrars.

Beginning with four campuses, over the past decade the number of participating institutions has steadily increased and now includes all ten UC campuses. The CCES was one of the first system-based online enrollment mechanisms developed in the United States, and its innovation in the educational technology sphere has been recognized with a national award.

Prior to the CCES, only a handful of students at each campus would work through the procedure for taking a course at another campus. The number of students enrolling in cross-campus courses has increased every year since inception of the CCES, from under 100 in its first year to more than 2,600 in 2022–23.

The development of the CCES has spurred a number of technological and workflow innovations across the campuses—many processes which were paper-driven are now digital and in many cases automated, most campuses have updated and improved their internal SIS and data reporting systems, and the opportunity to engage with system-wide opportunities such as the CCES has led academic advisors and others on campuses to encourage students to take advantage of other cross-campus and systemwide educational opportunities (e.g., UC Washington Center).

Identifying credit evaluation opportunities across the system via the CCES mechanism

One of the key components to the long-term success of the CCES is its ability to ensure students receive appropriate credit for courses taken away from a student's home campus. All courses taken through UC Online provide unit credit towards graduation, with the potential for General Education, pre-major, or major credit. The student's home campus makes the determinations of a course's credit based on campus-specific and programmatic requirements.

UC Online has developed a comprehensive credit evaluation history matrix, searchable as part of the UC Online website, allowing students to identify agreements between campuses on how courses within the CCES have been credited at each student's home campus.

As of 2022–23, 593 courses have been included in the credit evaluation matrix. The number of more-than-unit credit determinations has increased every year since the inception of the cross-campus enrollment system, and that will continue for the 2023-2024 academic year.

UC Online's activity and leadership in this cross-campus credit evaluation has established a strong system relationship, allowing for strategic discussion around further partnership areas across the campuses and with partners outside the UC system. The credit evaluation mechanism was a key component of establishing the parameters necessary to embark on the National Education Equity Lab (NEEL) pilot, connecting hundreds of high schools and thousands of historically underrepresented students with an opportunity to take UC courses for credit.

Centralized resourcing for online education projects via a systemwide funding mechanism

Between 2013 and 2023, UC Online provided more than $50 million of direct financial support to campuses for developing, implementing, assessing, and iterating innovations in online education—course design and development, technological integration, research on the efficacy of online instruction, digital inclusion professional development, structures, and systems to support campus online initiatives, and projects focused on closing equity and performance gaps.

Because the focus of UC Online has been to support the growth of online education in all its iterations, many courses funded through this mechanism were designed specifically for campus, rather than cross-campus, enrollments. Today UC Online courses have seen more than 700,000 enrollments since its inception, consisting of more than 500,000 unique students.

Alongside these initiatives was a similar call for technological support connected through campus academic and information technology departments. Funding through UC Online has supported cross-campus online education initiatives such as data transfer and automation protocols, technological development for teaching and learning, and single campus initiatives for integration, system management, and workflow efficiency.

Supporting UC faculty in development, implementation, and iteration of online courses

When ILTI was initiated in 2013, there were gaps throughout the system regarding the staffing of alt-academic roles (staff roles requiring both professional and academic expertise to support course development and educational structure) such as instructional designer, educational technologist, and media developer. ILTI invested in staffing these roles to both directly support campuses in developing for their needs as well as providing systemwide project coordination and specialized support to connect expertise and achieve collective impact. For the first seven years of ILTI, a majority of funded projects provided direct supports for development and implementation of online courses.

The online instructional and technological knowledge within UC Online was integral to supporting campuses in quickly pivoting instruction from in-person to emergency remote at the start of the pandemic in the winter/spring of 2020. ILTI was instrumental in developing guidance, offering direct and indirect support, engaging with faculty in any modality or sized group as necessary, and ensuring the highest level of quality available for the hundreds of thousands of students impacted by the unprecedented shift in modality.

By the 2019–20 academic year, every UC campus had a staff including instructional design, educational technology, and media coordination experts. In support of this evolution, UC Online had begun the shift from direct campus support to systemwide initiatives and key project management. The Bending the Curve initiative based out of UC San Diego is a prime example of this shift. Bending the Curve is a multi-disciplinary curriculum on climate change solutions, focusing on solutions designed to bend the warming curve, and to accelerate resilience and climate justice for the planet's most vulnerable people. The curriculum consists of content modules in more than 50 topics and practice areas, developed by researchers, scientists, and community leaders from all ten University of California campuses and beyond, coordinated and designed by UC Online. The course is presently taught on seven of nine undergraduate UC campuses, with licensing agreements that have expanded the course in various versions to universities beyond California—in the United States, Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Further agreements with businesses, nonprofit organizations and government agencies are expanding the impact to a global audience of climate warriors utilizing the opportunities of this multimodal learning experience to meet the needs of their particular domains. The breadth of material available in Bending the Curve enables instructors and audiences to assemble a solutions-based climate change course, tailored to learners in diverse departments and in numerous contexts outside academia.

Identify student support opportunities for online course completion

Since its inception, UC Online has shepherded a student support system based at UC Merced. The UC Online Support team offers a variety of help services for systemwide stakeholders. The goal is to provide a one-stop shop that caters to incoming questions from campuses and handles each case to a successful conclusion. UC Online Support has resolved tens of thousands of cases for students enrolled in courses at their home campus, cross-campus students, academic advisors, faculty, and administrative staff. These cases include a range of issues—from answering questions about the add/drop deadlines for UC Online courses to helping resolve technical problems with accessing a course.

Utilizing a campus location, grounded in a student academic environment, has proven effective. The concierge service has increased its engagement pathways to include phone, email, frequently asked questions, and online chat. Leveraging common technological platforms across the system, the team's case management services are integrated and provide scalable opportunities to handle the consistent increase of student enrollments.

Transition Phase: UC Online Evolution from Coalition Building to Strategy Setting (2023–2024)

The establishment of UC Online came from a number of initiatives dedicated to forging consensus by bringing together a coalition of the willing to pilot and prove efficacy on the role of online education across the University of California system. A decade into its establishment, now is the time for that forged coalition to be utilized for policy and strategy so that online education can support campus and system goals, including the goals of the Multi-Year Compact.

Transition work began in earnest over the summer of 2023 with a combined focus on internal and external visioning. Internally, UC Online has embarked on strategic plan development with the Office of the President's Strategy and Program Management Office, focusing on creating three- and five-year strategic plans while also identifying areas to support change management. UC Online and Institutional Research & Academic Planning codified their data sharing workflow during the summer and are working together to develop a dashboard of information regarding online education efficacy to go beyond compliance reporting and into particulars for effectiveness and growth.

Program leadership and systems thinking is at the forefront of UC Online's current trajectory. The proliferation of technological expectations and opportunities necessitates systems thinking on educational projects and platforms, a space where UC Online can create bridges across the UC system and provide valuable oversight, counsel, and expertise. One example of this approach is the UC relationship with the National Education Equity Lab (NEEL), an equity-focused program dedicated to providing historically underrepresented high school students an opportunity to recognize their potential by taking credit-bearing college courses. Coordinating the relationships between NEEL and the UC system will allow all members of the coalition to benefit—outreach and enrollment for each campus, a single conduit of negotiation and strategy for NEEL, and for every member a dedicated commitment to equity practice. Another example is UC Online's participation with the UC Reengagement Consortium (UCRC)—a multicampus, collaborative effort with four UC Extension operations that leverages one-time State funds to create a systemwide bachelor's degree completion program. UC Online is actively working with UCRC campus and systemwide partners to identify opportunities to develop, strengthen, and scale initiatives dedicated to supporting "stop-outs"—students who started but did not complete their degree—in returning to campus and graduating. Lessons from online education initiatives such as the Cross-Campus Enrollment System can be utilized for this population, and expertise around what constitutes high-quality online instruction will be integral to assisting the students in fulfilling their degree completion goals.

CONCLUSION

As the first decade of UC's commitment to online education from a system perspective resulted in the creation of structures and courses to support student achievement, the second decade will utilize the lessons learned to more fully align resources through strategic organization and a future-leaning perspective built on an increased recognition of the importance of shared data. Further collaboration across the campuses and engagement with strategic initiatives can provide

opportunities to further establish and scale high-quality online education throughout the UC system.

KEY TO ACRONYMS

CCES	Cross-Campus Enrollment System
ILTI	Innovative Learning Technology Initiative
NEEL	National Education Equity Lab
SIS	Student Information System
UCRC	UC Reengagement Consortium

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: UC Online Course List