

UC SANTA BARBARA FACULTY ASSOCIATION

## What's Wrong with Senate Bill 520?

Everything is wrong with Senate Bill 520. In specific:

- Senator and President Pro-Tem Steinberg, author of 520, did not consult any part of the Academic Senate while developing the bill, though he/his staff had every opportunity to do so in the January 2013 meeting of the Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates (ICAS).<sup>1</sup>
- Senator Steinberg's failure to consult is a further indication that business interests are driving the push toward MOOCs, not educational priorities.<sup>2</sup> As Robert Powell put it in his March 15, 2013 "Open Letter . . . About SB 520," "the clear self-interest of for profit corporations in promoting the privatization of public higher education through this legislation is dismaying."
- Senator Steinberg claims that the bill protects faculty rights, but this is little more than window dressing. In fact only one Committee (the California Open Education Resources Council) will be involved in reviewing MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), not the Senate committee duly constituted to review and approve new courses (the Senate Committee on Courses of Instruction). Moreover, only 3 UC faculty will sit on the Council (along with 3 from the CCCs and 3 from the Cal States). We believe that our fields of expertise are too specialized for this approach to work. In higher education, big undergraduate surveys introduce students to our special fields, and are best designed by faculty who know those fields best. Moreover, the proposal violates the APM and Standing Orders' emphasis on the *individual* rights of faculty as well as the importance of the general good. This bill has every potential to violate both faculty rights with respect to curriculum, and academic freedom.<sup>3</sup>
- There is no rationale for using online content developed by for-profit MOOCs. UC Faculty have historically been pioneers in the development of online educational resources. We are leaders in the fields of computer science, computer engineering, media arts technology, cognitive science, and the digital humanities.<sup>4</sup> The blends of online and face-to-face resources we create are of very high quality.<sup>5</sup>
- According to the 2010 Department of Education review of studies of online education, the blends mentioned above are clear winners in the "best practices" category.<sup>6</sup> The claim that online education is an adequate substitute for live classroom instruction has, in fact, no solid foundation. A more recent study

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<sup>1</sup> <http://icas-ca.org/meetings>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://utotherescue.blogspot.com/2013/03/moocs-have-become-straight-business-play.html>.

<sup>3</sup> **APM 005, University of California, Orders of the President, No.3: "Privileges and Duties of Members of the Faculty,"** I.1: "A Standing Order of the Board of Regents requires the Senate to 'authorize and supervise all courses of instruction in the academic and professional colleges and schools.' In practice, the Senate delegates this duty to its Committee on Courses of Instruction. Authorization and supervision of curricula are entrusted to the various colleges. The courses which constitute these curricula are, then, of interest to the Faculties of the Colleges, as well as to the Senate." **APM-015, Faculty Code of Conduct, Part I: Professional Rights of Faculty:** "In support of the University's central functions as an institution of higher learning, a major responsibility of the administration is to protect and encourage the faculty in its teaching, learning, research, and public service... and to preserve conditions hospitable to these pursuits. Such conditions, as they relate to the faculty, include..."**participation in the governance of the University, as provided in the Bylaws and Standing Orders of The Regents and the regulations of the University"; "approval of course content and manner of instruction" [emphasis added]; and "establishment of requirements for matriculation and for degrees."**

<sup>4</sup> E.g. <http://dc-mrg.english.ucsb.edu/>; <http://www.bioimage.ucsb.edu/>; <http://www.cns.ucsb.edu/>; <http://www.allosphere.ucsb.edu/>.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. <https://gauchospace.ucsb.edu/>; <http://www.carseywolf.ucsb.edu/emi/events/digitalocean-connecting-ocean-sustainability>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf>.

of online education outcomes from Columbia University shows not only that student performance suffers across the board in exclusively online classes, but also that males, minorities, and economically-disadvantaged students in particular perform much more poorly than in live classroom courses or blends.<sup>7</sup> Senator Steinberg claims that SB 520 will ensure “access” and support the kinds of students who can’t pay the dramatically higher fees that followed upon his own legislature’s slash-and-burn defunding of public higher education. But these are the very students least likely to complete online courses successfully. They will be buying (at considerable expense) a cheapened product unlikely to advance their educations. SB 520 will not help disadvantaged students; it opens the door to their *further* exclusion, exploitation, and demoralization.

- Post-defunding, access to courses is a huge problem for aspiring community college students, and a problem also for the Cal States. But “UC’s graduation rates and time to degree performance show that access to courses for our students is not an acute issue.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the 50 (for now) undergraduate entry-level large lecture classes mentioned in SB 520 pose no obstacles to completion. They are in fact easily expanded to meet demand. The roadblocks lie elsewhere, e.g. in lab requirements, which cannot be fulfilled online.
- Studies in neuro-education show that students need to acquire a lot more than information in order to learn.<sup>9</sup> They need to be motivated to do so, and they also need help learning how to analyze the knowledge they acquire, how to develop insight, and how to create *new* knowledge. In these respects, nothing can compete with the “live” classroom or laboratory experience, just as no recording can compete with the inspiration and power of a live concert performance. Students at UC have the opportunity to develop ongoing *relationships* with some of the best minds and mentors in the world. They also have the chance to be mentored by the highly-motivated graduate students who lead, under faculty supervision, the individual sections of large undergraduate courses. These graduate teaching assistants are excellent role-models, and they are also the knowledge-makers to come. Where will non-UC students using distance online content find the tutors, counselors, and mentors to motivate, support and inspire them?
- It goes without saying that any student is free to “attend,” virtually or in the flesh, any institution of higher education that accepts them. Course credits are always transferrable if the courses in question meet UC standards and the student is accepted to UC. These processes are already in place. The only thing 520 will accomplish is to give away the UC “brand” to for-profit online courses vetted by only three UC faculty. It solves no problems and creates many new ones.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://academiccommons.columbia.edu/item/ac:157286>.

<sup>8</sup> Powell letter, 3/15/2013.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Paul Howard-Jones, *Introducing Neuroeducational Research: Neuroscience, Education and the Brain from Contexts to Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2010.