



320 STEPHENS HALL

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Statement on Online Courses

September 14, 2011

Over the past decade, the Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI) has considered the issue of online instruction. COCI's work has included the formation of two working groups and study and deliberation at various committee meetings; these efforts have been intended to prepare for requests to approve online course proposals at UC Berkeley. To manage this relatively new form of instruction, COCI has developed extensive procedures, including new instructional formats, criteria for review, and supplementary questions that are required to be answered for any new online course proposal. COCI also established a prefix, W, to be used for fully and predominantly online courses, and a phrase added to Catalog listings noting "This course is web-based."

While COCI has approved 21 online courses as of spring 2011 (at the lower division, upper division, and graduate levels), the committee still believes online instruction is in an experimental stage on campus. COCI found the online course proposals it has approved to be well thought-out and of high quality. In every case, COCI considered the online courses to be equivalent to their face-to-face counterparts, only with a different delivery format. Thus, it should be noted that the W prefix is not intended to imply that a course is substantially different or inferior to the traditional classroom version of the same course. COCI would not have approved any course that was not thought to be of "Berkeley quality." Instead, the W prefix is intended to provide transparency, a way to track enrollment trends, and to allow somewhat experimental courses to be offered while limiting the likelihood that a *de facto* undergraduate online degree or substantially online degree would emerge unintentionally and without the appropriate administrative and Academic Senate review processes in place. While the idea of a "cap" for undergraduates has been pondered, there is currently not enough data to establish such a limit – that is, before we gain more experience with online courses. Establishing a cap, if that becomes desirable, will also require input from faculty, departments, and committees across campus and is beyond the purview of COCI alone. In the meantime, departments or colleges may wish to keep track of online courses, and the W prefix allows this to be done readily, in the same way as other prefixed courses (e.g., the H prefix signifies an honors course, R denotes a course that satisfies the Reading and Composition requirement, etc.) or suffixed courses (e.g., the AC suffix for a course that satisfies the American Cultures requirement, the L suffix for a laboratory course, or the S suffix for a self-paced course).

Given the questions that a potentially growing number of online courses raises, COCI has taken the approach of approving exceptional online courses, with a plan in place to research them, re-review them, and keep track of emerging trends to inform the committee so that it can move forward deliberately with checks and balances in place. As the campus moves forward with experimenting with online courses, COCI looks forward to working with faculty to ensure continued excellence in instruction at UC Berkeley.

Kristie A. Boering
2010-11 Chair, Committee on Courses of Instruction