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TO: Departmental Course Contacts, Department Chairs, and Instructors of Record
FROM: The Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI)
DATE: January 23, 2013
RE: Student-Facilitated Courses and Student Groups

The Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI) has the opportunity to review all proposals for student-facilitated directed group study courses (98 and 198, including DeCal courses). Most of the course proposals are thoughtfully presented and are quickly accepted by COCI, as COCI traditionally supports department decisions regarding these course sections. However, a small but significant number of courses have recently raised more serious concerns related to their close relationships with existing student organizations or internship programs. While there is nothing wrong with this practice in principle, conflicts can arise when a proposed student-facilitated course largely mirrors the existing operations of a student organization. When considering proposals for approval, COCI recommends that departments consider the following questions:

1. Is this course open to all academically qualified UC Berkeley students? COCI has reviewed several proposed courses that have stipulated that membership in a separate organization is a requirement for enrollment, which is not permitted—any prerequisites must be academic.
2. Is the course description sufficiently independent of the student organization? COCI has noticed some proposals in which essentially the same description was provided for the course as for the student organization/program.
3. Are there any required activities or assignments that may be inappropriate for a college course? Requiring students to conduct fundraising activities and advocacy for a separate student organization is an example of an activity that COCI deems inappropriate.

It is worth reflecting on whether student organizations should utilize the student-facilitated course format as a means of obtaining academic credit for what were previously considered extracurricular activities. Perhaps this is seen as an effective way to boost membership, increase legitimacy, or ensure commitment from participants. But this practice essentially converts extracurricular activities into curricular activities, and COCI views this as contrary to the spirit of student-facilitated courses.

At present, COCI is not discouraging student organizations from forming student-facilitated courses. However, we have seen enough problematic proposals this year that we are encouraging departments, sponsoring faculty, and student organizers to ensure that proposed courses are a) open to all students for enrollment; b) do not require advocacy, fundraising, or publicity for student organizations; and c) do not discriminate against those students who choose not to optionally participate in the student organization's activities.