

Principles of UC Berkeley's Online Education Strategy

By the Steering Committee for Online Education June 2012
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Elements of higher education are moving online very quickly. More than 30% of all enrolled college students, some six million people, participated in online learning at accredited U.S. colleges and universities in 2011. At the same time, online higher education is still at an early stage of development, with enormous opportunities for experimentation and learning. Every student, faculty and staff member, administrator, and alumnus has an interest in how we approach this opportunity. This document proposes principles to guide Berkeley's strategy for online education that, in partnership with the Academic Senate and administration, should assist units in designing online education offerings, clarify campus-level priorities, and accelerate Berkeley's growing reputation for leadership in this area.

Our approach to online education reflects five principles:

1. **A commitment to access and excellence.** We will take advantage of new technologies to extend, not replace, our proven approach to higher education. Our primary focus as a campus will be to support online offerings that extend and enhance our ability to carefully select students and teach them at the highest academic standard through defined programs of study and individual courses. Although online education will have significant impact on higher education over the long-term, we strongly believe in our existing approach to education and in Berkeley's identity as a community of scholars. The scale and pacing of our online initiatives must be driven by our ability to thoughtfully extend our community in ways that protect and advance the reputation of Berkeley, deepen the critical relationship between our faculty and students, enhance the perceived quality and uniqueness of the on-campus student experience, and grow the value of our intellectual property. As a public institution, we must be particularly thoughtful about our investments, the partnerships we forge, and how we steward the reputation and experience of Berkeley.
2. **A focus on improving teaching quality.** We believe online education will help us in our efforts to improve the quality of teaching. Our online activities will respond to deep changes in the experiences and expectations of our students—particularly the ways that they use new technologies to communicate, engage and learn. We believe that the new technologies and social media create important opportunities for us to offer richer educational experiences and to continually assess and improve our teaching. This should enhance teaching and learning at all

levels, undergraduate as well as graduate, and across our diverse areas of focus. In addition, online education will provide us with the opportunity to think in new ways about the learning environment and the student experience, and allow for rich cross-department, cross-discipline discussions.

3. **The opportunity to generate revenue and other types of return on investment.** Online education offers a promising opportunity to generate new revenue, improve long-term financial sustainability, and ensure that we can continue to deliver on our mission of access and excellence across everything we do, including our on-campus programs and research. We must be diligent to ensure that we realize this financial potential as we develop and test online educational offerings and increasingly integrate them into traditional teaching methods. We must recognize that revenue-generating models and priorities related to revenue may be quite different from one department to another and each model may require different types and levels of support.
4. **Learning through experimentation.** Online education is in its infancy. It will be many years before different approaches, technologies, and offerings mature and are either refined or rejected. We believe Berkeley's long-term position will be dictated by the quality and distinctiveness of our education, and not by being first to market. We also must look carefully at the net benefits of early partnerships. As a research-intensive institution, we place value on experimentation and learning, and believe that premature standardization around technologies and platforms may hinder our effectiveness long term. Our scale and breadth, aided greatly by the strength of our global reputation, allows us to play an important role in applying and rigorously testing different solutions, as well as in fundamental research on learning outcomes. We need to plan for experimentation, learn from our experiments, and regularly and systematically share our learning.

Our approach to enacting online programs will adhere to an approach that has served Berkeley well in all of our other initiatives. This is characterized by:

- **A “federated and jointly-enabled” model that places design and implementation responsibility with Schools and Colleges.** We will embrace a range of online offerings designed by our Schools and Colleges rather than force ourselves towards a one-size-fits-all campuswide approach. Schools and Colleges are uniquely positioned to understand both the potential and challenges of online education in their disciplines, the particular pedagogical needs of a given discipline, and the necessary pace and resourcing. We believe a more decentralized approach is going to position us well for the long term, and fits our culture.
- **Focus on four types of online education.** Our campus will focus on four categories of online offering. The first is revenue-generating certificate and graduate degree programs that are in

high demand. Second, undergraduate gateway and hybrid courses that increase available capacity and enrich learning for our on-campus students. Third, “public good” courses that we will typically offer for free to a wide audience as a community service and as a proven approach to exposing potential students to outstanding Berkeley faculty. Finally, the development and sale of online educational content that can be deployed by other institutions or organizations. We will prioritize development of academic and administrative policies that help to enable and guide development in these four categories.

- **High, campus-wide standards for student admission, instructor selection, academic content, and student performance.** Although outside entities may help us to market or produce online offerings, the core determinants of a Berkeley-branded academic experience must remain in the hands of Berkeley’s academic leadership.
- **Faculty and graduate student support.** The majority of our faculty lack experience developing online courses. A critical part of our campus strategy will be creating the campus-level resources and knowledge-sharing mechanisms that will help our faculty and graduate students to produce courses and create an online learning experience that reflects Berkeley’s standards.
- **Campus-level support and guidance.** Our online offerings will differ in many ways, but they will all require support from campus-level entities, ranging from the Academic Senate, to the Registrar, to financial and legal services. It is important that each new online effort not endeavor to rebuild the university in microcosm. For our campus-level functions to effectively support online programs, it makes sense to develop standards to ensure that each online program can be adequately supported. We need to address these and many other important campus-level questions about how we invest, engage with outside entities, distribute financial proceeds, and support teaching and students.
- **Integration.** We must integrate online education into the “core fabric” of Berkeley over time. While we can approach online programs for a while as a “bolt on” to our on-campus model, online methods will ultimately transform our traditional teaching program and we need to begin to systematically align our administrative and support functions to meet the changing needs of online and traditional programs, including student support. We also aspire to manage online education through the same bodies, and eventually processes, that govern on-campus education. Over time, we must ensure that we recognize online teaching in similar ways as on-campus teaching and ensure that online students have access to the defining elements of the Berkeley community and network.
- **Shared learning and resources.** While we do not advocate a single, common platform for all campus online efforts, we will have many opportunities to share resources and tools and to respond to common “pain points” that Schools and Colleges will inevitably encounter when developing online programs. These might include particular technology solutions, common

administrative or student support interfaces, or support for course production. We intend to establish a small unit or office to assist in development of shared solutions that can be used by Schools and Colleges on an opt-in basis. We will consider how to staff and organize to develop and deliver shared resources and tools, including the potential of a separate, UC Berkeley controlled non-profit entity. Over time, we might be able to offer tools and resources successfully applied at Berkeley to other institutions, which would be consistent with Berkeley's research tradition.