

Committee on Educational Policy

Policy on UCSC Undergraduate Fully Online Courses

Introduction

Online instruction is rapidly being integrated into the national undergraduate experience. Many instructors at UCSC have already developed innovative ways of using technologies in online courses that provide high quality learning experiences. As with any new approach to teaching at UCSC, it is important to monitor the quality of the educational experience being offered. This oversight is the remit of CCI (for individual courses) and CEP (for overall policy)

Departments and other course offering academic units should consider where and how they think online courses are best used in their curricula. Departments and programs that have already had such conversations and developed policies around them will be well placed to help individual instructors develop successful proposals for online courses with minimal additional steps. CEP will work with departments that have not already developed such policies in doing so.

For the purposes of this policy, a *fully online* course is defined as a course section that uses online contact hours (e.g. online lectures or discussion sections, without the option for classroom attendance) and offers less than one hour of pedagogically significant face-to-face contact each week¹. A face-to-face contact hour is defined as a lecture or discussion session taught by the primary instructor that a student can attend in a setting where the instructor is physically present, even if the session is simultaneously presented online. Face-to-face hours do not include office hours or time spent in exams or contact hours with secondary instructors (such as teaching assistants).

Fully online classes with no or very limited face-to-face student/instructor contact represent a distinct approach from hybrid courses that combine online technology with lecture time or discussion sessions, or from telecast courses. Every UCSC course is expected to meet the same high standards, whether in-person, hybrid, or fully online. Common characteristics of high-quality classes include: active engagement of a qualified instructor who has significant expertise in the subject of the course; regular and pedagogically significant interactions between instructor and students; and a means for students to periodically assess their progress towards achievement of course learning outcomes. As with in-person classes, fully online classes will provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities.

A successful fully online course presents educational experiences that differ from those associated with in-person courses, but provides students with an equivalent educational outcome to that of an

¹ UCR & UCB define an online course as one in which fewer than one-third of the total hours required are face-to-face; UCI defines it as zero face-to-face meeting hours; UCLA uses the same definition as UCSC.

in-person class. This equivalency should therefore apply to other aspects of educational policy. This guiding principle is relevant to the credit that students receive for taking the class and means that the approval pathway for an online class should (after the initial monitoring period) be the same as an in-person class.

CEP and CCI wish to encourage, not discourage, the creative use of technologies in fully online courses with the aim of improving student learning. Supplemental information from online instructors is requested in order to study the crucial aspects of a successful online offering.

Course Approval Pathway

The course approval process is as follows:

1. Instructors first consult their department's policy about online courses in their curriculum, if one exists, and develop a course consistent with it.
2. Instructors work to obtain approval from the Department for their course proposal.
3. Instructors may then contact Academic Affairs for consultation regarding development or support.
4. Instructors must then apply for approval from CCI (Committee on Courses of Instruction), which requires an online supplemental form, and a report after the first and third years.

A. POLICIES FOR APPROVAL OF FULLY ONLINE INSTRUCTION COURSES

1. Fully online courses will be approved initially for up to three offerings of the course or for three years after the initial offering of the course, whichever is shorter.² Renewal will be based on CCI's assessment of the third-offering or third-year report. Guidelines for assessment are given in Section C below. ILTI supported courses are subject to this approval process, but can fulfill their initial five-year contract regardless of the outcome of the three-year assessment.

2. Required courses for majors and minors cannot be offered exclusively in a fully online format. When a fully online version of a gateway or required course exists, students must also be given the option to take the course in person during the same academic year. Over the academic year, the fully online version of the required course can only offer up to one-half of the total seats in the course.³ Exceptions to this policy must be approved by CCI, and must be based on clear pedagogical advantages or on student demand.

3. All online courses will be clearly identified in the schedule of classes and included in the course catalog.

² UCSB requires re-review after 2 offerings, UCSD after 3, UCLA after 3 years or 3 offerings, UCB after 4 years.

³ This is the same as UCLA's policy.

4. All campus policies and regulations for courses and instruction (registration deadlines, academic integrity, grading, instructor availability, etc.) that apply to non-online courses also apply to fully online courses. Classes must conform to the standard 10-week (academic year) and Summer session schedules.⁴

5. The initial approval process of a fully online course will follow the standard CCI procedure. However, proposed fully online classes must respond to additional questions as part of the CCI approval process (listed below, but subject to revision by CCI).

B. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION FOR INITIAL FULLY ONLINE COURSE PROPOSALS

Instructors requesting to teach a fully online course will respond to the following questions for the initial approval (three offerings or three years). If this course has been proposed as part of a competitive course award call, such as through ILTI, attaching the full application or proposal will suffice for answering any duplicative questions. If any of these questions are directly addressed in the department's online course policy, attaching the policy and referring to it, will suffice for addressing that question.

1. Why is this course being proposed as an online course?
2. What is the place of the course in the department or program's curriculum? If the course is a major or degree requirement and has an in-person counterpart, please discuss how the two types are scheduled in relation to each other, what kinds of enrollments are expected, whether both will be treated as exactly the same when determining if students have satisfied the requirement, and similar logistical points. If it is not a requirement and has an in-person counterpart, will the latter continue to be taught? Whether or not it is a requirement, if it has an in-person counterpart, will both carry the same number of credits? Does the course fulfill the "Disciplinary Communication" requirement, and if so, is there any difference in the way that the online course does so versus its in-person counterpart?
3. What specific pedagogical advantages and disadvantages will the technologically-mediated format offer?
4. What is the nature of instructor involvement in the proposed alternative mode of instruction? How much contact time will each student have with the instructor or instructor designees during virtual office hours, blog or discussion groups? What technology will be used for interactions with remote students?
5. How will student progress be monitored, and feedback provided to the students? Describe graded activities mediated through technology and how materials will be handled to verify student identities and to ensure that students only receive credit for their own work.

⁴ UCR makes the same statement regarding scheduling.

6. State how midterms and final exams will be administered and explain what steps will be taken to maintain academic integrity. If the course has proctored exams, there must also be an in-person option available.
7. How will the course design ensure accessibility for all students? FITC has some initial suggestions: <https://its.ucsc.edu/fic/tutorials/fic-accessibility.html>.
8. Is any specific technical or pedagogical expertise (on the part of the student or TA or instructor) necessary for this course? If there is, what training is available, and what plans are there for malfunction, disruption, or unavailability of technical support? Are there special subscriptions and/or software required for a student to complete the course?
9. How will course material that is archival in nature (e.g., recorded webcasts, voiceover slides) be updated for future offerings? Can it be easily moved to other platforms or adopted by other instructors?
10. Please provide a department letter confirming that the anticipated TA workload will remain within contract limits.
11. In the case of online courses offered collaboratively between campuses, please consult with Academic Affairs regarding such questions as: how will coordination be maintained between campuses, and who will be responsible on this campus for consultation with students? Will students on different campuses earn the same number of credits? Please explain if any distinctive arrangements are required.

C. PROCEDURE FOR ONLINE COURSES SEEKING PERMANENT APPROVAL

After three years or offerings, a report is required for permanent approval of an online course. This can take the form of updating responses to questions 1-11 above, in addition to responding to question 12 below. The report is not confined to these questions and can adopt a different form if seen by the reporter as more appropriate. However, CCI can follow up with questions that include 1-12.

12. Please include a letter of evaluation from the Department. This letter should include the ways in which the course addresses Departmental curricular needs as well as an overall evaluation of the course. If any of these points are addressed by the department's online course policy, the policy may be attached and referred to as appropriate.

- a. The overall evaluation should be based on work by instructors in collaboration with their departments and, if possible, with IRAPS to provide data from assessments of student learning and from student evaluations that gauge how online instruction is meeting the outcomes of the course. For comparison, representative data from in-person offerings of the same course should be provided, from the same time period if possible. Specific questions should be added to student evaluations that address unique online instruction issues such as technical problems students may have, course format and learning, and quality of feedback.

b. Describe changes, if any, to the methods of fully online course instruction used that were made as a result of assessment and course evaluations. Discuss the “lessons learned” from delivering this fully online course. If the course was previously offered in-person, describe advantages and disadvantages of fully online instruction.

Approved by the Committee on Educational Policy on November 14, 2018