

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

ONLINE EDUCATION JOINT TASK FORCE

REPORT

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Online Education Joint Task Force

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PREFACE

Online educational initiatives and tools are transforming higher education, broadening access, allowing new forms of learning, and encouraging dramatic innovations in teaching. They also have profound implications for faculty, potentially affecting everything from job descriptions to intellectual property and academic freedom. And in ways that are not yet fully understood, they are affecting the finances, the institutional configurations, and ultimately the missions and commitments of colleges and universities.

As a world class research university and center of innovation, the University of Washington has been, and needs to be fully, yet thoughtfully, engaged in these initiatives. Online courses have been part of the undergraduate curriculum for years. A growing portfolio of post-graduate and professional degree programs are offered in diverse online formats, many of them exclusively online. In 2012, UW signed contracts with Coursera and EdX, the leading platforms for Massive Open Online Courses. More than a dozen courses have been created by UW faculty members, including some of the most popular offerings in the MOOC universe, reaching hundreds of thousands of registrants from around the world. In fall 2013, UW launched its first fully online undergraduate degree program, offering a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood and Family Studies through the College of Education. Next fall two new undergraduate completion degrees will begin, one leading to a BA in Integrated Social Sciences hosted by the College of Arts and Sciences at UW Seattle and the other to a BA in Criminal Justice in the Social Work Program at UW Tacoma.

To help “navigate this changing landscape,” in October, 2013, Provost Ana Mari Cauce and Faculty Senate chair Jack Lee assembled the Online Education Joint Task Force. Provost Cauce’s charge letter (see Appendix 2) asked the Task Force to:

make recommendations about the role of online education at UW, including fully online undergraduate and graduate degrees, MOOCs and other relevant digital initiatives with a focus on the appropriate scope of such initiatives, the risks and opportunities that exist for the UW as we, or if we, expand our involvement in these areas, and what, if any, additional mechanisms are needed to review such initiatives to ensure they are meeting the needs, and appropriately serving both students who experience the university primarily online and those in our more traditional programs.

Accordingly, the Task Force has limited its inquiry to the three types of online educational initiatives mentioned in the charge, each of them offering distinct opportunities and challenges.

- fully online undergraduate completion degrees
- fully online graduate and professional degrees
- MOOCs and related courses which, although not offered for credit, carry the University of Washington brand

This represents but a fraction of the university’s online educational enterprise. The expanding portfolio of online courses and hybrid courses are beyond the scope of our report. The Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning has issued recent recommendations regarding new

technology and teaching and should take the lead in planning the future of teaching innovations broadly at UW. We view this as a dynamic area warranting ongoing oversight to track new developments.

This report begins with a summary of key recommendations and then in separate sections provides detail about each of the three types of online initiatives.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Online initiatives, including MOOCs and degree programs, have the potential to enhance education for our existing student body, reach new students, advance public education and engagement, and provide opportunities for research on many fronts.

1. *We recommend that UW continue to be actively involved in these and other innovations.*
2. *We also recognize that UW needs to be careful about committing resources in ways that may detract from the university's core missions. We stress that initiatives designed to serve off campus learners should not drain funds or faculty from existing programs that serve the onsite student body.*
3. *Therefore, we recommend that oversight procedures be established to help coordinate and evaluate proposals for new online degree programs and MOOCs, and that these programs be periodically assessed. Oversight can be handled by Faculty Councils and administrative systems that are already in place, although some adjustments in the scope of Council functions is recommended.*

Resources

In a [2011 report and a 2013 letter](#) to President Young, the Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning explained the importance of online educational initiatives and advised that these are not without cost, but it is important that the University commit resources to enable access to innovative technology and technological support and to help faculty members learn new tools and new teaching methods. The report stressed that maintaining educational quality is critical, that faculty-student ratios in online classes should be similar to ratios in onsite classes, and that it is important to “centrally identify and disseminate best practices in online education and provide pedagogical support to educators in implementing best practices within their courses.”

4. *The Task Force reiterates the Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning recommendations for adequate funding and support at levels that can ensure educational quality.*
5. *In addition, the Task Force recognizes that provision of academic support services (e.g., libraries, advising, etc) is critical to educational quality and must be factored into the planning, financing, and delivery of online education.*

Intellectual property

Online degree programs, MOOCs, and other online courses involve the creation of course materials (such as videoed lectures) over which intellectual property ownership is unsettled and sometimes contentious. Contracts that allow UW programs or other entities to transform, repurpose, or reuse course materials without the permission of the author/creator are not appropriate.

6. *We recommend that UW establish contractual norms that address the shared ownership and need for shared stewardship of materials in which both faculty and UW have invested resources.*

Oversight

New online undergraduate completion degrees: The three degree programs that have been approved give us a good sense of the challenges, which include the need to carefully predict costs and enrollments, to negotiate the interface with on-campus programs and services, and to add faculty and staff in conformance with UW standards. Existing oversight procedures seem to have worked well in the case of the Early Childhood and Family Studies degree and the Integrated Social Sciences degrees. Both proposals were closely vetted by the Faculty Council on Academic Standards, which looked at curricula, and the Senate Committee on Planning and Budget, which evaluated budget plans and overall impact concerns. The Criminal Justice program was approved internally at UW Tacoma and went through program, school and campus review.

We propose some modifications in these procedures to provide better coordination across the three campuses and to provide for adequate follow-up assessment of online degree programs. It is clear that online degrees at any campus may have implications for all three campuses in ways that onsite programs usually do not. The online marketplace will permit only a limited number of UW labeled degrees and we want to foster collaboration rather than competition across the campuses.

7. *We recommend that proposals for new programs be evaluated at a central level and that all campuses be consulted at an early stage in planning.*
8. *Units contemplating new online degree programs should alert their chancellor and the Provost before embarking on detailed planning.*
9. *On the Seattle campus, FCAS and SCPB should continue to provide primary oversight. Tacoma finds its 3-step review effective, and Bothell will need to determine an oversight system, should it offer online degrees.*
10. *The Faculty Council on Tri-Campus Policy may need to adjust procedures in order to coordinate consultation.*

As with on-campus programs, all new programs must be assessed within five years of inception. UWS Faculty Council on Academic Standards plans to review the ISS and ECFS programs after three years. UWT's Academic Policy and Curriculum Committee (APCC) is responsible for online program review. The Graduate School has the expertise and resources to conduct the interviews and gather the data needed for adequate program reviews.

11. *We recommend that the Graduate School initiate all program assessments of online degree programs and report to FCAS, SCPB, UWT's APCC and the responsible faculty council on the Bothell campus.*

New online graduate degrees: The Graduate School currently reviews proposals for new certificate and degree programs. This mechanism has worked well for the most part.

12. *We recommend that the Graduate School continue to review new program proposals.*

- 13. We also recommend that the Graduate School make sure that existing online programs are separately and rigorously reviewed during its 10 year reviews of academic unit, and that reviews include experts in online pedagogy and programming.*

MOOCs: These are different than degree programs because they are not offered for credit; do not target our student population; are created by individual faculty members, thus raising different academic freedom issues; and they have been funded by UW without the goal of direct return on investment, thus raising different financial issues. UW Educational Outreach provided the technical services and funding for many of the initial MOOCs. The Department of Computer Sciences and Engineering created and hosts another set of MOOCs in the CSE field.

Much remains to be decided about the future of MOOCs at UW. How do we evaluate their success? Should new offerings be supported? How many? How will they be funded? Will UW continue to work with Coursera and EdX, the two major national and international platforms for MOOCs? Will we, as proposed by UWEO, launch a new consortium for online education currently called ASG that is composed of a small number of interested leading research universities? Will future MOOCs award credit or other forms of recognition? The Provost, in consultation with the Senate Planning and Budgeting Committee, will make key decisions about new and old contracts and the commitment of resources to MOOCs. The Faculty Council on Academic Standards makes decisions involving curriculum and credit. But this task force believes we need a place for creative planning and collaboration to help shape the next steps for UW MOOCs and other experiments in open education.

- 14. We recommend that the university develop improved mechanisms for making strategic decisions related to MOOCs. The Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning (FCTL) and perhaps the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) could be involved, along with UWEO which until now has made most decisions.*

UNDERGRADUATE ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS RECOMMENDATIONS

Part of our Task Force charge is to develop a UW policy framework for undergraduate online education. We can summarize our recommendations as follows:

1. *Because developing online undergraduate education provides a way for UW to open access that is affordable and adaptable for non-traditional students, we have a public responsibility to develop such programs, especially at a time of widening income inequalities that directly relate to students' abilities to complete their degrees.*
2. *Because many for-profit and private competitors are also developing online programs that use a high enrollment / low cost and low completion model, we have a responsibility and a capacity to offer a high quality public alternative focused on degree completion.*
3. *Because providing a high quality online degree requires rigorous assessment and systematic protections against cheating, new online undergraduate degree programs should be subject to a robust review process that generates comprehensive reports that are in turn subject to review by the faculty and senior administration. These reviews, which should also be used as the basis for making ongoing program improvements, must be undertaken on a regular schedule, and, at a minimum, every 5 years.*
4. *Because the Graduate School traditionally provides the tri-campus institutional framework for the review of all other programs, we recommend that it also be the unit trusted with organizing the comprehensive reviews of online bachelor degrees.*

Promises and Challenges

More generally, we would like to recognize that online undergraduate education is full of both promise and challenges. The UW therefore needs to develop ways to identify and address the challenges while still steering towards the promises. In this spirit, we offer the following chart of simplified binary oppositions together with an overarching recommendation that UW keeps striving to realize the best possibilities while dodging the dangers. We recognize this is easier to recommend than it is to realize in practice. The larger ecosystem of online education includes a large number of private (and quasi-private) competitors organized primarily to acquire revenue using low cost, low support models that may reduce 'access' to a marketing slogan all the while offering students very little in return for pushing them further into debt. In 2012, the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions found that 54% of for-profit college students dropped out without a degree while racking up billions in student loan debt. The committee also noted that: "Many for-profit colleges fail to make the necessary investments in student support services that have been shown to help students succeed in school and afterwards, a deficiency that undoubtedly contributes to high withdrawal rates. In 2010, the for-profit colleges examined employed 35,202 recruiters compared with 3,512 career services staff and 12,452 support services staff, more than two and a half recruiters for each support services employee."¹

¹ Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, For Profit Higher Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Ensure Student Success, Washington DC: 2012, accessed at: http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/ExecutiveSummary.pdf

This for-profit approach focused on market logics and marketing is the exact opposite of what we hope will be the UW approach going forward, a UW approach that is instead focused on robust student services and careful investment in quality curricula rather than in aggressive, incentivized recruiting of any and all students. In the same way, the UW approach to faculty employment should remain distinct from the casualization of academic labor in the for-profit online sector. Rather than employing a workforce almost entirely composed of contingent ‘adjunct’ faculty on highly precarious, low paid short-term contracts with limited or no benefits, we should build our programs on the basis of secure long-term teaching contracts that also allow for faculty governance of online program improvements in the usual ways. We should explore online data analytics and a range of technologies in addition to Learning Management Systems (LMSs) to improve student learning and completion rates. UW should be innovating pedagogically and teaching students the new digital communication and collaboration skills needed for global citizenship and productivity in the 21st century. With our new degree programs, we believe UW is already embarking on this distinct ‘public education’ pathway into the world of online undergraduate teaching, and the chart offered here is just one more tool we can use to stay on the high access, high support, and high completion track into the future.

PROMISES	CHALLENGES
ACCESS	COMMODIFICATION
OPENNESS	PRIVATIZATION
NEW FORMS OF STUDENT INCLUSION	NEW FORMS OF STUDENT ISOLATION
LOWERED TUITION / HIGH TOUCH ADVISING	LOW SUPPORT / HIGH ATTRITION
EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION	REDUCTION OF TEACHING TO TRAINING
NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS	TRADITIONAL TRAINING MODELS
TECHNOLOGICAL CREATIVITY	TECHNOLOGICAL FETISHISM
LIBERATING FACULTY TO ENGAGE PERSONALLY	DISCIPLINING FACULTY WITH TECHNOLOGY
EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP	EDUCATION TURNED CONSUMERISM

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS RECOMMENDATIONS

Part of our Task Force charge is to develop a policy framework for graduate and professional online education. We can summarize our recommendations as follows:

- 1. The Graduate School currently reviews proposals for new certificate and degree programs. This mechanism has worked well for the most part.*
- 2. We recommend that the Graduate School continue to review new program proposals.*
- 3. We also recommend that the Graduate School make sure that existing online programs are separately and rigorously reviewed during its 10 year reviews of academic unit, and that reviews include experts in online pedagogy and programming.*

At University of Washington, we always have been committed to, and recognized for, exceptional quality education within our graduate and professional programs. For the same reasons as within undergraduate education, the UW is beginning to grow its online program developments to serve diverse students and to innovate its pedagogy.

The Graduate School has a robust approach to reviewing new program proposals and programs once established. We propose utilizing the current systems of review, while making particular note to assure tri-campus consultation with new program proposals and assuring appropriate online pedagogy and program expertise within review committees and consultants.

Existing New Program Proposal Review

New graduate degree proposals submit an application to the Graduate School Office of Academic Affairs and Planning, and are encouraged to consult with staff and the Associate Dean there as they develop their proposal. The Center for Teaching and Learning can be recommended as an additional resource as needed to assist the new program in developing robust learning experiences appropriate for graduate students during the program development stage. A Planning Notice of Intent must be submitted in advance of the full proposal and is distributed to key UW stakeholders over a 10-day comment period.

The existing criteria for review of new program proposals remain relevant for online degree programs. Each criterion will have unique dimensions when considering how an online program will be responsive, and thus, we recommend appropriate expertise in online education among the consultants and reviewers utilized.

Existing elements for new program proposals:

- Connection to Institutional Role, Mission, and Academic Unit Priorities
- Documentation of Need for Program
- Curriculum, provided in detail, including student learning outcomes and delivery mechanisms utilized and justified
- Infrastructure Requirements

- Faculty, including role in oversight and demonstrated contribution to program quality
- Administration, including staff and support services
- Students served, including projected enrollments
- Diversity, including recruitment and diversity plans
- Program Assessment, including how outcome data will be gathered and used
- Accreditation, where appropriate
- Budget, including impact of new program on existing programs within the academic unit

The program proposers are responsible for assuring final approval at the appropriate levels (department or unit, Dean's Office or Chancellor's Office, etc.) before submitting the final proposal to the Graduate School. The Graduate School obtains external reviewers for the program proposal (the new program provides six recommended names for possible reviewers). After receiving external reviews, the proposing program develops a formal response, and the whole submission then goes before the Graduate School Council, and if recommended to proceed, is submitted to the UW Board of Regents for final approval.

Current Review Process for Existing Graduate Degree Programs

The Graduate School Office of Academic Affairs and Planning administers extensive academic program reviews to assure program quality at levels expected for the UW as stipulated in the *University Handbook* (Section 12-28). As the current review process is efficiently used and integrated within our UW administrative and leadership systems, we propose continuing this approach with the possibility of a more frequent but modified review of new programs at the three-year mark (currently new programs are reviewed at five years and established programs every 10 years). Individual programs can always be recommended for more frequent review at the new proposal or review stage.

The program review process includes an extensive self-study report from the program, a site visit from external reviewers, and active participation from the Graduate School Council.

Existing review criteria include:

- Mission and Organization Structure
- Budget and Resources
- Academic Unit Diversity
- Student Learning Goals and Outcomes
- Instructional Effectiveness
- Teaching and Mentoring Outside the Classroom
- Scholarly Impact
- Future Directions

The current systems of graduate program review should serve the University of Washington well in advancing excellence in online graduate and professional degree programs. The Graduate School is

committed to continuously incorporating new methods to assure tri-campus collaboration and new considerations for evaluation of online pedagogy.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING MOOCS

Prelude: MOOCs as Just One Form of Digital Public Engagement

MOOCs are fundamentally different from university online courses and degrees. MOOCs are largely a vehicle for engaging with the (global) public. Such digital public engagement is a valuable scholarly activity: it allows a scholar to bring the lessons of his/her field to the broader public, using online education to influence society and interact with citizens. Scholars with successful online courses can also positively influence the teaching of their discipline well beyond their own classroom. As such public engagement is very important for a public institution; MOOCs are a valuable opportunity – for engaging with all citizens, including alumni and potential future students.

However, MOOCs are only one of many ways to achieve such public engagement. Even in the online space, well-conceived blogs, websites, webinars, social-media interactions, etc. can serve similar purposes. We focus only on MOOCs here because (1) it is consistent with the charge of the Task Force and (2) as described below, MOOCs require some more central academic leadership and strategy. We nonetheless emphasize that we encourage all forms of digital public engagement and believe they are worthy pursuits for interested faculty.

Summary of Recommendations

Part of the Task Force charge is to propose a UW strategy for MOOCs. We can summarize our recommendations as follows:

1. *Because MOOCs represent appealing opportunities for faculty and the university to have worldwide scholarly impact, they are an exciting vehicle that interested and able members of the university community should be encouraged to adopt within the guidelines sketched below. Providing open, high-quality educational content to citizens of the state and the world furthers the University's civic and scholarly public mission.*
2. *However, MOOCs consume time and money. Such resources should not be consumed in ways that detract from achieving our educational goals for UW students. They are not a replacement for other teaching responsibilities although there may be opportunities for synergy between MOOCs and UW courses.*
3. *Because MOOCs are neither credited UW courses nor UW degree programs, they are distinct from other online educational initiatives. Therefore, they need not be subject to the same review processes required for university courses and degree programs.*
4. *Because (1) MOOCs are currently branded with the University's name and (2) MOOC platform-providers contract with the university and require a coordinated university partnership, we recommend that the university develop improved mechanisms for making strategic decisions related to MOOCs. The Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning (FCTL) and perhaps the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) could be involved, along with UWEO which until now has made most decisions.*

5. *As MOOCs evolve, questions will remain related to intellectual property, potential for course credit, and revenue possibilities. Because no simple, complete answers exist for these issues, we present broad principles and provisional answers to guide future decision-making.*

Because MOOCs are a relatively new phenomenon and not widely experienced or understood, we thought it beneficial to provide a more extensive discussion of MOOCs than necessary for the online degree programs recommendations. *MOOCs: Context and Framework* (Appendix 1) should be considered in tandem with the recommendations above.

APPENDICES

1. MOOCs: Context and Framework

2. Committee Charge Letter

MOOCs: CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK

Because MOOCs are a relatively new phenomenon and not widely experienced or understood, the Online Education Joint Task Force thought it beneficial to provide a more extensive discussion of MOOCs than necessary for the undergraduate and graduate online degree program recommendations. Following is the conceptual framework and rationale for the recommendations concerning MOOCs.

What matters about MOOCs? They are open (non-UW) courses

A full history and description of MOOCs is beyond our scope here, so we focus on aspects of them relevant to our recommendations. For our purposes, MOOCs are free online education opportunities available to everyone. They are substantial endeavors for participants (e.g., several weeks long as opposed to a short seminar or tutorial) and designed to support thousands (or more) participants simultaneously. They typically involve many resources including video content, discussion fora, homework exercises that may be automatically graded or peer-assessed, multiple-choice quizzes, and so forth.

Which aspects of the MOOC acronym are most relevant to guiding university *policy* and university *strategy*?

Massive: Many MOOCs are very large, with thousands of students finishing and an order of magnitude more starting. This large scale is not particularly relevant to policy. For strategy, widespread global participation makes MOOCs an essential vehicle for having global impact, too big and popular to ignore (even if, like many new things, MOOCs endured a phase of excessive hype). They can serve as a way to reach many target populations beyond UW's degree-seeking student body, such as professionals in a discipline, UW alumni, policymakers and potential future students.

Open: That MOOCs are public content branded with the university's name is highly relevant to policy. In many ways, they represent the university just as web pages, brochures, and community activities do. They are free, so their value cannot be measured in terms of revenue returned: even if there are potential revenue streams, revenue is not their primary purpose. Openness is also consistent with many cherished values of a public university. In terms of strategy, open content should be appealing for the university to showcase some of its best work and instructors -- and to make the opportunity available to as many interested faculty as is feasible. In theory, there may be long-term concerns that open content threatens the financial viability of higher education. In practice to date, open content like course web pages and textbooks in public libraries has only increased demands for university education, which is a much more comprehensive and systematic enterprise, and we see little reason to believe

MOOCs will have a different effect imminently on the shape of demand for traditional university education.

Online: As more and more of society and education moves online, we should aim not to distinguish policies and strategies for the online and offline settings. Like with online UW courses and degree programs, we believe online is not the key distinguishing feature even though in the case of MOOCs, “online” is an essential technology for achieving “massive” and “open.” *Online* is a means to an end.

Course: The word “course” is the most difficult one to navigate for MOOCs. Clearly, participating does not make someone a UW student and the MOOC itself is not a UW course. However, this distinction is often blurred both by the MOOC platform-providers (e.g., Coursera and EdX) as well as the university and faculty in promoting MOOCs. The word “course” is already overloaded. It is often used for things that are not in the UW course catalog (e.g., imagine a “one-day course” taught on campus by an outside consultant or a summer program on campus or any number of other activities), but here the confusion is arguably deeper since a MOOC may or may not have substantially the same content as an official UW course. In short, for both strategy and policy, we claim that while MOOCs are “online courses offered by UW,” they are not “online UW courses,” which is not as hair-splitting as it may initially seem. We might prefer a word other than “course,” but it is impractical to avoid the common use of the term for MOOCs. Appropriate disclaimers (e.g., “this offering is provided as a public service of UW but is not an official course of the university,” or whatever language is most legally and conceptually useful) should suffice.

How MOOCs differ from the rest of online education

MOOCs are much less focused than UW courses on individualized instruction, student assessment, and student accreditation. They are not designed to bring in substantial revenue or to provide UW credentials to students (although, as discussed below, we are not averse to experimenting with novel credentials for MOOCs, clearly distinct from other UW credentials). A useful analogy is with a conventional textbook. Like textbooks, MOOCs are the product of authors eager to provide a self-contained, coherent treatment of a subject area to a wide audience. They can influence and grow an academic field to the credit of the authors and their institution. Students in MOOCs can participate to varying degrees just as purchasers of a book choose how deeply and thoroughly to engage the content.

MOOCs differ in at least three ways from textbooks. First, they are viewed — accurately or not — as more cutting-edge than textbooks. Second, video content is pervasive, but this change of modality need not have major implications (in particular, both writing and video production are time-consuming enterprises that can be undertaken individually by faculty but can have improved production values with the help of editors). Third, MOOCs are interactive, with the opportunity to have assigned work graded (although not individually by subject-matter experts for practical reasons) and with a large social-component (e.g., with discussion fora).

To oversimplify but nonetheless provide essential perspective, the existing norms for book authorship can inform the path forward for MOOCs — much as existing university policies and

strategies for courses and degree programs should inform recommendations for (non-MOOC) online courses and degree programs.

How MOOCs differ from independent scholarly work

At the extreme, we could try to view MOOCs as independent scholarly work, leaving to members of the university community the full latitude otherwise given to them to produce public content. After all, we surely do not entertain onerous policies governing how faculty members write web pages, post videos (e.g., to YouTube, which is a service of Google, a for-profit company), or more generally make available educational materials even when those materials are derived from a university course created by the faculty member. Indeed, when in doubt, we should err toward openness and preserving room for agile and experimental independent work.

However, MOOCs in their present form do require more university oversight and assistance for a few reasons. First, it is the university that has entered into contracts with MOOC platform providers Coursera and EdX. These relationships are essential for effective MOOCs that reach large target audiences. They require coordinated interactions between these companies/organizations and universities. As a practical and contractual matter, the university needs to identify which MOOCs will be produced and who is in charge of UW decisions for MOOCs. Second, MOOCs carry more of the University name and brand than books. While the wording differences may be subtle, a book author simply indicates his/her university affiliation whereas a MOOC instructor may teach a MOOC actually offered under the auspices of the university. Third, there are potential revenue streams and novel credentials associated with MOOCs that require uniform university treatment. (More discussion and our recommendations on these matters are elsewhere in this document.) Fourth, MOOCs are still novel, public, and large endeavors for which the university has a vested interest in producing successful and high-quality results. Fifth, MOOCs are more likely to use non-trivial university resources (video studios, instructional designers, student assistants, etc.) than independent work.

Recommendation #1: MOOCs should be encouraged

Because MOOCs represent appealing opportunities for faculty and the university to have worldwide scholarly impact, they are an exciting vehicle that interested and able members of the university community should be encouraged to adopt within the guidelines sketched below. Providing open, high-quality educational content to citizens of the state and the world furthers the University's civic and scholarly public mission.

Subject to the monetary and policy constraints discussed in the other recommendations, the university should provide a supportive environment for creating high-quality MOOCs. Indeed, the value of MOOCs to society as well as to the faculty and university should make them an appealing scholarly activity to encourage -- so long as doing so does not detract from other responsibilities nor increase the expected workload on university members. In other words, if an instructor or academic unit wishes to create high-quality MOOCs, the university should aim to be a help and not a hindrance. Work on MOOCs should be valued and rewarded much like

other scholarly work and professional service. Because MOOCs may become established as a key way for leading universities to have external impact on academic disciplines, the university should hope to increase the quality and quantity of its MOOC offerings.

There are many ways the university could encourage modest to moderate growth of MOOCs without substantial diversion of resources from other goals. As discussed below, instructors or units could bear the cost of MOOC creation while still being able to leverage shared expertise across the institution in areas like video production, content creation, course management, using MOOC platforms, data analysis, etc. Successful MOOCs could be highlighted as novel ways the university engages with the public. Documents covering policies, workflows, and best practices for MOOCs could be developed to guide creators of new MOOCs. In fact, such documents from other institutions could likely be adapted easily to benefit the University of Washington. Moderate revenue (see below) could allow popular MOOCs to “break even” after a small number of offerings.

Recommendation #2: Time and money for MOOCs should not come from teaching resources

MOOCs consume time and money. Such resources should not be consumed in ways that detract from achieving our educational goals for UW students. They are not a replacement for other teaching responsibilities although there may be opportunities for synergy between MOOCs and UW courses.

Developing a MOOC takes substantial time and effort, so in a “zero-sum game” that effort must come at the expense of something else. That “something else” should not be our existing academic commitments to our students. To that end, the administration has indicated that tuition revenue will not be used to create MOOCs. We recommend this policy continue to help minimize any concern that MOOCs are harming the university’s students.

However, plenty of room remains for creating MOOCs even if MOOC expenses exceed any MOOC revenues. Instructors can choose to use the time they already have available for duties beyond their core teaching responsibilities (i.e., time for research, public engagement, and other forms of scholarship). For courses deemed valuable by partner organizations or funding agencies, procuring grants, contracts, and fellowships can help to cover costs.

Moreover, MOOC content creation can often improve our existing educational activities. Video content can be used for MOOCs and lead to “flipped” or “hybrid” classrooms. Existing videos can also help new instructors teaching existing courses. The large-scale data available from MOOCs can be used to improve pedagogies in ways otherwise undiscoverable, such as identifying particularly good or bad materials (lecture examples, exam questions, etc.). Potentially, the worldwide MOOC audience can also bring global perspectives into an on-campus experience. MOOCs can provide incentives (via increased scholarly impact) for faculty to embrace educational technology. Overall, the line between MOOC resources and UW educational resources may become more blurred over time and we should allow it to become blurred when doing so benefits the education we provide to UW students. In other words, there are likely thoughtful ways to bring MOOC activities closer to our central academic teaching activities in ways that only increase the value we provide to UW students.

We also note that the expense of MOOCs is often misunderstood and may decrease over time. The physical equipment needed to create videos, for example, need not be expensive and can be reused across courses. Rather, the primary cost is one of time (and therefore salaries).

Just as self-publishing a textbook is far more feasible than it was only a few years ago, the staff assistance needed for successful MOOCs may decrease as the medium matures (and, indeed, early MOOCs were produced by “amateur” tech-savvy domain experts). Naturally, the future is impossible to predict and an alternate theory is that MOOC production values will increase over time, requiring additional staff and expertise, but most publishing and educational technology has become cheaper and more “self-service” over time. For now, the fixed costs for MOOC production are small beyond substantial faculty time.

Recommendation #3: MOOCs should not be treated as UW courses

Because MOOCs are neither credited UW courses nor UW degree programs, they are distinct from other online educational initiatives. Therefore, they need not be subject to the same review processes required for university courses and degree programs.

MOOCs are branded with the university’s name as “courses” and “online offerings,” but appropriate disclaimers should make clear that they are not official UW courses. For example, some UW MOOCs (at the instructor’s discretion) offer “statements of accomplishment” to students completing the course satisfactorily. These documents carry no official accreditation but participants treasure them and may choose to use them as they wish. The University has approved the following disclaimer on such statements:

THE ONLINE OFFERING NOTED ABOVE IS NOT A COURSE OFFERED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON. THIS STATEMENT OF ACCOMPLISHMENT IS NOT ISSUED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON AND DOES NOT CONFIRM OR IMPLY ENROLLMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON. THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON AWARDS NO CREDIT FOR THE ABOVE OFFERING AND MAINTAINS NO RECORD OF THE OFFERING OR OF ANY STUDENT’S ENROLLMENT IN THE OFFERING.

Given that MOOCs are not UW courses and have no bearing on UW curricula or degree programs, the current procedures for faculty oversight of curriculum changes – in particular, the Faculty Council on Academic Standards (FCAS) – do not apply. However, the administration should actively seek the advice of the faculty on both general MOOC policies and on plans to create additional MOOCs. Two options are to create a new university committee or to ask FCAS to take on this additional and distinct role. Both approaches should work with the latter more expedient. In the near term, we expect the number of new MOOCs to be created each year to be small (perhaps 1-10), so scalable and permanent procedures would be premature.

Recommendation #4: MOOCs need some coordinated, academic administration

Because (1) MOOCs are currently branded with the University’s name and (2) MOOC platform-providers contract with the university and require a coordinated university partnership, we recommend that the university develop improved mechanisms for making strategic decisions related to MOOCs. The Faculty Council on Teaching and

Learning (FCTL) and perhaps the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) could be involved, along with UWEO which until now has made most decisions.

The current approach to managing our MOOC offerings and interactions with MOOC platform-providers (currently Coursera and EdX) needs improving. Let us first review the current state, which evolved rapidly in 2012. The contracts between UW and Coursera/EdX were negotiated at the level of the Provost's Office, with leadership from the Vice Provost for UWEO. Moving forward, we expect such work to continue to be led by the upper administration. We recommend that *the primary goals of such agreements be to maximize the opportunity for faculty to achieve impact through MOOCs and for the university to enhance its academic leadership and reputation.* Naturally, financial risks and opportunities are also relevant to these agreements. Furthermore, it is important that, as in current agreements, the university and individual faculty do not give up or restrict their ownership of teaching materials or their rights to use them in other novel ways.

MOOC creation and maintenance, as well as logistical interactions with Coursera and EdX, have followed two models. Roughly half the courses have been administered by existing UWEO staff with instructors signing a contract with UWEO regarding rights and responsibilities (e.g., ceding ownership of the videos to UWEO). The remaining courses have been offered by the Department of Computer Science & Engineering (CSE), working directly with Coursera.

Both approaches have significant shortcomings. For the UWEO courses:

- UWEO is a self-sustaining entity. While UWEO staff has built considerable expertise developing and supporting MOOCs, its capacity to support new projects is uncertain.
- The ability to use innovative technology to engage the public online and to improve classroom pedagogy is too important to our core mission to reside only in a self-sustaining unit.
- UWEO has made decisions about support and hosting particular courses without adequate consultation with faculty councils.
- Some faculty interested in creating MOOCs would prefer not to work under the workflow, timeframe, and intellectual-property constraints that are UWEO standard practice.

For the CSE courses:

- The ability to produce MOOC content is probably something many academic units do not have the technical competency or size to do on their own without some guidance. CSE faculty members have the experience to provide such guidance, but not a logical role on campus to do so.
- While CSE has enjoyed excellent interactions with Coursera staff, the MOOC platform-providers need a small number of university contacts. Coursera cannot handle separate interactions with multiple academic units.

Moving forward, we recommend that UW develop a mechanism for facilitating and coordinating MOOCs and similar teaching instruments that is at least partially separate from

UWEO. Strategic decision making should reside in a non-self-sustaining unit and should closely involve the Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning.

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) might be the appropriate vehicle if funding and staff permit. Working closely with UWEO, CTL could be tasked with providing pedagogic guidance to faculty members developing MOOCs, facilitating new high-quality MOOCs. This responsibility could dovetail well with CTL's existing role as a "bridge-builder" on campus, bringing together different organizations and units interested in educational technology and innovation.

Recommendation #5: Questions around content-ownership, course-credit, and potential revenue

As MOOCs evolve, questions will remain related to intellectual property, potential for course credit, and revenue possibilities. Because no simple, complete answers exist for these issues, we present broad principles and provisional answers to guide future decision-making.

We recognize that many questions about MOOCs remain unresolved and are unlikely to reach clear answers in the near term. In general, we recommend remaining open to flexibility and innovation, to allow innovation -- even controversial exploration -- in the MOOC space on an experimental basis. Innovation invariably requires trying new things before all questions are answered.

We briefly consider below some of the current issues.

Seeking Revenue: Receiving revenue for MOOCs need not be a university priority. However, it is nonetheless worthwhile to work with MOOC platform-providers on revenue approaches to help offset costs that are consistent with our goals of scholarly impact. Two potential revenue streams are potentially available now and could be considered on a limited trial basis with units/instructors interested in doing so.

First, there is what Coursera calls *Signature Track*: participants pay a modest fee (approximately \$50) for a "verified certificate." Such a certificate indicates that *Coursera (not UW)* "has confirmed the identity of this individual and their participation in the course." It further indicates the course is an "online non-credit course offered by UW through Coursera." The primary benefits to the university are (1) increased impact since these certificates are popular among some participant populations and (2) revenues on the order of roughly \$100,000 per year as estimated by Coursera given current number and frequency of UW's MOOC offerings. Second, some MOOC content, including content on Coursera, cannot be used by other academic institutions as part of an official course (or independent study) without the permission of UW and Coursera. However, Coursera (or another platform-provider) could provide the content and associated support for a fee, somewhat like a textbook.

Sharing Revenue: The existing contracts with MOOC platform-providers stipulate a division of revenue (should it come to exist) between the providers and the university. Such a division is a contractual matter we leave to the administration as future contracts are negotiated, noting in

passing that the platform-providers have significant expenses. A more open question is what the university should do with any revenue it receives: should it be used entirely to recoup central costs or is it appropriate for revenue to be shared with faculty members creating content (perhaps in the form of budgets available for future projects)? It may be best to devise an equitable split with faculty agreed upon before courses are created. We do not recommend a particular scheme at this time: consulting with other institutions that have answered this question may shed more light.

Rewarding Instructors: In the absence of revenue (as just discussed), we do not recommend MOOC instructors be financially compensated specially for creating MOOCs (even though many other institutions do so), nor should MOOC development be considered part of normal teaching workload. However, we recommend that creating high-quality open educational content can be viewed positively as scholarly work, worthy of consideration as part of existing reviews for issues such as meritorious service, promotion, and tenure.

Intellectual Property: Current contracts with Coursera/EdX make clear that the platform-providers do not own the core MOOC content (videos, homework assignments, etc.), but rather they have a license permitting certain uses. What remains unresolved, then, is who *does* own the content – the university or the instructors or some combination thereof. This is a subtle matter not considered in depth by our task force. We hope instead to rely on concurrent work at UW by the Special Committee on Intellectual Property and Commercialization.

Academic Credit: Because we do not view MOOC participation as equivalent to participating in a university course (which, among other things, verifies identity, enforces individual academic integrity, and provides individual assessment), it follows that UW would not in general provide academic credit (or transfer credit) for work in MOOCs. However, two complications arise. First, if other institutions do accept such credit and we accept transfer credit from those institutions, then students can circumvent this policy. It remains unclear if this problem will arise in practice. Second, if students really have already mastered course content based on MOOCs, they may make the argument that they should not need to take corresponding UW courses. We are likely a few years away from understanding the scale of the issue, so proactively considering all contingencies is likely premature – for now.



UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

October 21, 2013

Revised, June 2, 2014

Online Education Joint Task Force

James Gregory, Professor of History and Chair of SCPB, Co-chair

Betsy Wilson, Dean of University Libraries and Vice Provost for Digital Initiatives, Co-chair

Jan Carline, Professor of Medical Education

Colleen Carmean, Assistant Chancellor for Instructional Technologies, UW-Tacoma

Jeffrey Cohen, Assistant Professor, Social Work Program, UW-Tacoma

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Jeff McNerney, ASUW representative

David Pengra, Senior Lecturer of Physics

Matt Sparke, Professor of International Studies and Director of Integrated Social Sciences

Jane Van Galen, Professor, Education Program, UW-Bothell

Bill Zumeta, Professor, Evans School of Public Affairs

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the joint task force to study the future of online education at the University of Washington.

The taskforce should be prepared to make recommendations about the role of online education at UW, including fully online undergraduate and graduate degrees, MOOCs and other relevant digital initiatives with a focus on the appropriate scope of such initiatives, the risks and opportunities that exist for the UW as we, or if we, expand our involvement in these areas, and what, if any, additional mechanisms are needed to review such initiatives to ensure they are meeting the needs, and appropriately serving both student who experience the university primarily online and those in our more traditional programs.

The University of Washington has played a leadership role in the digital realm, but this is an area where the landscape is shifting rapidly, and where the reach of online courses or programs can be quite expansive and have impacts beyond a department, college or campus that it is not clear our traditional review mechanisms can address. The taskforce is charged both with developing an outline of key questions we should be asking and addressing as we navigate this changing landscape and with making recommendations about how to best address these questions.

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I am hoping that I can join you for a meeting as you are close to wrapping up your charge and at that time we can discuss what type of reporting back would be best, but at the moment I am anticipating a written report.

Dean and Vice Provost Wilson's office will be in touch with you to schedule the first meeting of the committee, which will occur in Autumn Quarter 2013. I will attend a portion of that meeting to discuss the charge with you in more depth.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,



Ana Mari Cauce
Provost and Executive Vice President

cc: Lizabeth Wilson, Dean, University Libraries, Vice Provost for Digital Initiatives, Co-chair
James Gregory, Professor of History and Chair of SCPB, Co-chair