April 23, 2013

The Honorable Carol Liu  
Chair, Senate Education Committee  
State Capitol, Room 2083  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 547 (Block), as introduced February 22, 2013  
Scheduled for Hearing in the Senate Education Committee on April 24, 2013  
Position: SUPPORT IF AMENDED

Dear Senator Liu,

On behalf of the University of California (UC), I am writing to convey our desire for amendments to SB 547, which as currently drafted would direct the academic senates of UC, the California State University (CSU), and the California Community Colleges (CCC) to begin developing online courses that satisfy the requirements of the Intersegmental General Education and Transfer Curriculum (IGETC). Senator Block is to be thanked for taking the lead on this issue. If our proposed amendments are adopted, the University would be in a position to support the bill.

We recognize that there is a great deal of interest within the Legislature in ensuring that California students continue to have access to higher education opportunities. Moreover, UC shares Senator Block’s belief that online instruction can be a component of our commitment to access.

We believe, however, that SB 547 would better serve the Legislature’s and the University’s mutual interest in expanding the availability of online courses if the bill were amended to provide incremental funds for needed infrastructure and technical support. In addition, any amendments should explicitly recognize the following:

- The Legislature should acknowledge that faculty at each of the three higher education segments (UC, CSU, and CCC) are best positioned to determine which courses meet their institution’s academic standards and which are tailored to the needs of their matriculated students.
- The development of online courses should be led by the faculty of each segment, with the respective academic senate approving courses that can be made available across the campuses within that system. This would expand online course availability by allowing to enroll in online offerings at their segment’s sister campuses throughout the state. These efforts will also need to address issues of the infrastructure necessary to allow such cross-campus articulation.
Efforts are already underway at UC to address a shared desire of the UC, the Governor and the Legislature to increase online offerings to matriculated students. Any legislation should recognize efforts to expand and build upon initiatives currently underway as eligible for support from funding made available through the State Budget.

The issue surrounding the proposal to offer these courses across the segments is much more complex, involving operational, policy and financial concerns that deserve attention, but only after UC, CSU, and the CCC systems can work through the significant issues surrounding online offerings for matriculating student within each segment of public higher education, and to learn from and evaluate the experience of serving their own students. We anticipate that a better understanding of intramural offerings should be reached within a couple of years. In the meantime we cannot support legislation that would press for across segment courses prematurely and without evaluation of in-segment courses.

The UC Online Education initiative and ongoing campus projects offer access to numerous online courses that have been developed by our faculty and these will soon be made available to students throughout the UC system. As stated, increasing access for our matriculating students remains a primary goal of our online efforts. For example, UC is in the early stages of streamlining the process for cross-campus enrollment, making it easier for students to take advantage of course offerings throughout our system (in both online and traditional course formats).

The Governor’s January budget earmarks $10 million from UC’s core budget to increase online offerings. UC anticipates using these funds to develop and support additional undergraduate online courses for UC students, particularly in high enrollment, lower-division courses that are in greatest demand at our campuses. UC has just issued an RFP for new course proposals to our faculty and we hope to have selected courses up and running soon.

UC’s ability to implement these initiatives in online education depends largely on the availability of continued funding to accomplish these goals. Online instruction may ultimately reduce the costs of obtaining a degree, but the development and dissemination of online courses cannot be done on the cheap, if UC is to maintain its commitment to quality, as well as access.

We look forward to working with Senator Block and the Committee on the development of this legislation as it moves forward. Should you have any questions regarding our position, please contact me at 916-445-9924.

Sincerely,

Steve Juarez
Associate Vice President & Director

cc: Senator Marty Block
Members, Senate Education Committee
President Mark G. Yudof
Provost Aimée Dorr
Senior Vice President Daniel Dooley