

# UCSC Faculty Association Senate Bill 520 Update

March 28, 2013

## Links

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[Amendments to SB  
520](#)

[SB 520 Fact Sheet](#)

[Open Letter to  
Members of the  
Academic Senate](#)

To the UCSC Community:

Bob Meister, President of the Council of UC Faculty Associations (CUCFA), has issued the following statement in opposition to SB 520 and a series of similar measures currently making their way through Sacramento. All of these measures would compel the UCs to accept courses that would be offered by online corporations such as Coursera (which UCSC has just contracted to work with). We have reproduced his statement below, and to the side we have linked an Open Letter from the System-wide Academic Senate which includes their concerns about the bill, and a copy of the proposed language of the bill.

SCFA Executive Board

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CUCFA OPPOSES SB 520

--Bob Meister (President of the Council of UC Faculty Associations)

After a decade of skyrocketing tuition, Sacramento politicians have seized on a new gimmick to avoid paying for the kind of low-cost, high quality college education California used to guarantee all its students.

SB520, sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Steinberg, proposes to "solve" the problem of over-enrolled gateway courses at California's public universities and community colleges by requiring them to grant "full academic credit" for "comparable" courses completed on new for-profit online platforms (such as Coursera and Udacity) and existing for-profit schools (such as Kaplan and Straighterline).

This solution appears to be a zero-cost proposition for California's taxpayers and students because many of the new online courses are presently free, except for the cost

of providing certificates of completion.

The problem with this too-good-to-be true solution is that it is too good to be true.

As soon as SB520 becomes law, sellers of certificates of completion for online courses would find themselves in the new-legislatively-created-business of selling guaranteed transfer credits redeemable at any public university or college that admits the student to a degree program.

SB520 places no limits on what these for-profit providers could charge for these certificates despite the fact that the universities or colleges would have to honor them. At the same time, as budget cuts make access to gateway courses scarcer (particularly at the community colleges), SB520 would create windfall profits for the private sector that will not be burdened with the infrastructure or quality controls that have made public university and community college degrees valuable.

The long term result will be higher costs for students and a continuing decline in the quality of their publicly-funded education, all in the name of removing bottlenecks in lower division required courses that cuts in state funds have created.

SB520 would establish for the first time anywhere a system of legislatively-mandated transfer credits between a public higher education system and the for-profit sector of education providers. This hasty and ill-conceived bill is a legislative giveaway to a growing private industry with no commensurate public benefit or regulation.

Our public leaders should instead concentrate on restoring the promise of the low cost and high quality public higher education that built California.

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