

# Online-course bill is sharply criticized by top UC faculty leaders

In a crossing of swords between academics and politicians, the University of California's top two faculty leaders on Friday strongly criticized legislation that would allow students bumped from overcrowded core courses at state schools to instead take online courses from other colleges or private companies.

The bill, authored by state Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento), "raises grave concerns," Robert L. Powell and Bill Jacob, the chairman and vice chairman of the UC system's faculty Senate, wrote in a letter to colleagues. Among other things, "the clear self-interest of for-profit corporations in promoting the privatization of public higher education through this legislation is dismaying," they said.

The Steinberg legislation, introduced Wednesday amid strong national interest, proposes a special review panel, composed of faculty from UC, Cal State and community colleges, to determine which online courses are worthy of academic credit.

The goal is a list of up to 50 basic undergraduate courses that students could take online for UC, Cal State or community college credit if they cannot gain enrollment into those courses on campus.

Powell, a chemical engineering professor at UC Davis, and Jacob, a mathematics professor at UC Santa Barbara, rejected that plan as an assault on the power of UC's Academic Senate to determine whether transfer courses cover the right material with the same rigor as UC courses do.

"There is no possibility that UC faculty will shirk its responsibility to our students by ceding authority over courses to any outside agency," they wrote.

The two, who are the faculty representatives on the UC Regents board, said they were not consulted in advance of Steinberg's announcement but said they plan to meet with his staff soon.

The faculty union at the Cal State system previously expressed similar concerns.

Rhys Williams, Steinberg's spokesman, said Friday that the bill specifically gives California faculty control, albeit in a new way, over which online courses should be approved and that "nobody is trying to take away power from the faculty."

He said the senator's office "embraces the opportunity to discuss" the bill with faculty leaders and that its details might change as a result.

However, he said the senator remains committed to the legislation's goal of helping students.

"Students and middle-class families are in desperate need of action to break the bottlenecks that are preventing timely graduation and ultimately increasing the burden of student debt," Williams said.

[larry.gordon@latimes.com](mailto:larry.gordon@latimes.com)