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## **College educators from across U.S. take on ways online classes can help or wreck a student's hopes for a good education**

COLUMBUS, OHIO—Faculty and staff members from colleges and universities across the U.S. met in Ohio over the weekend to address some of the toughest issues facing student success in America's higher education system.

The rapid drive to move students' classes from campuses to online and the Gold Rush mentality behind many entrepreneurs pushing the new teaching schemes — especially the latest incarnation known as MOOCs (massive open online classes) — was a hot topic at the 5<sup>th</sup> national meeting of the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE).

"The use of MOOCs as substitutes for classes where students get feedback and guidance from a live teacher undermines our campaign's key principle—that colleges in this country need to be affordable and give our people a good quality education," says Eileen Landy, professor of sociology at State University of New York, Old Westbury and an officer in United University Professions.

Proposals to use MOOCs are popping up across the U.S. through spin-offs from Stanford, Harvard and other big name universities as well as from for-profit vendors.

"Let's not be confused about this," says Steve Hicks, President of the Association of Pennsylvania State College & University Faculties. "A Harvard MOOC is not a Harvard education and we need to help parents to understand that."

In addition to discussing problems with MOOCs, the CFHE gathering looked at other more promising ways to use online teaching tools, including "hybrid" courses already in use at many colleges. Hybrids use some online lectures and other tools combined with face-to-face classroom time between students and teachers.

"Of course, we have always used the latest innovations in teaching," says Rudy Fichtenbaum, President of the American Association of University Professors and professor of economics at Wright State University in Ohio.

"But the tough truth is that when you do it right, online teaching doesn't save money," Fichtenbaum says. "And it doesn't leave lots of room for profits for those companies wanting in on

the action. Education is not cheap and we should not kid ourselves about that. But if we don't educate people well, the price paid by our economy and our democracy will be painfully steep."

The meeting dealt with some disturbing specifics about the price that may be paid by some groups in a thoughtless race toward online classes for all students.

Shanna Jaggars of Columbia University in New York presented research (see <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/research-project/online-courses.html>) showing that while *all* students perform less well in online settings, some groups of students—especially males, Hispanic, and African-American students--have much larger dips in their learning.

"We simply cannot leave whole sectors of the American people behind," says Theresa Montaño, president elect of the National Education Association's National Council on Higher Education. Montaño, a professor at California State University Northridge added, "Racing to a mode of teaching that *increases* the achievement gap for underserved groups of students is the wrong way to go if we, as a nation, are truly interested in educational equity."

Maria Maisto, president of the national non-profit New Faculty Majority, emphasized yet another negative effect of current approaches to online learning: "Too often in American higher education, the most vulnerable students are being taught by the most vulnerable faculty—people who work on short-term, temporary, low-wage contracts. That is a disservice to students who need the most help to succeed and it often heightened in online settings. When faculty teaching them aren't provided with the necessary training, support and resources, student success suffers."

The Campaign for the Future of Higher Education was founded in 2011 to bring the voice of college and university faculty and staff into the national debate over higher education policy.

The 5<sup>th</sup> national CFHE meeting had participants representing faculty in Arizona, California, Florida, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Virginia. Many other states have been represented at previous gatherings in Los Angeles, Boston, Washington DC and Sacramento, CA and all participate in a national CFHE steering committee.

The next gathering will take place in New York City in January 2014.

*For more information or for interviews with participants in many states and localities, please contact Brian Ferguson 916-281-8785 or Lisa Cohen 310-395-2544.*

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