In Fall 2012, President Perez asked for a viability study for LAMC’s PACE Program. A PACE Viability Committee was formed in response to that request, and it conducted a Viability Review during Spring 2013. That review consisted of an examination of the theoretical underpinnings of the original PACE system, the history of LAMC’s PACE Program, statistical analysis of LAMC’s PACE Program over the last five years, a survey of department chairs whose discipline’s offered classes under the PACE Program, and an open forum to elicit feedback on the suspension of the program from students, faculty, and the community. This document summarizes the committee’s findings and details its recommendation.

The PACE Viability Committee, based on its review of the evidence (including an examination of the theoretical underpinnings of the PACE concept, the history of LAMC’s PACE Program, statistics on PACE courses since 2008, a survey of department chairs whose disciplines offered PACE classes, and an open forum for comments from students, faculty, and the community, all of which are detailed in the Committee’s full report), recommends that LAMC’s PACE Program be discontinued.

Although anything further than that recommendation is not a part of the Committee’s mandate, the Committee would like to suggest that Academic Affairs, working with the Academic Senate and/or the Educational Planning Committee, examine the feasibility of providing, through alternate means, some of the more attractive elements of the PACE Program such as alternative scheduling to better meet the needs of fully-employed adult students.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMITTEE’S FINDINGS:

The committee found several positive aspects to the PACE Program. These include:

- PACE supports the College Mission. It offered classes in a format specifically designed to accommodate working adults. It offered a “track” system that, if followed, should allow a student to complete their transfer requirements within two years. In these ways, PACE was “ensuring that students successfully transfer to four-year institutions.” In addition, PACE offered Bridge programs for students to complete math and English requirements, assisting students to “improve their basic skills,” while also preparing them to transfer.

- It also supports the goals of the Educational Master Plan (EMP). PACE’s Bridge program is part of LAMC’s efforts to “strengthen...developmental and basic skills education.” (EMP goal 1.2) Its alternative schedule answers to EMP goal 2.2, adjusting course offerings in response to student needs. Both of these are also attempts to meet EMP goal 4, which involves improving student success in transferring and obtaining degrees.

- Considerable research seems to indicate that several elements of the original PACE system have a positive impact on student success. These elements include a clear, programmatic approach to obtaining transfer, the establishment of student cohorts, and accelerated programs of less than 16-week semesters.
But the committee also found weaknesses in the PACE Program as it had come to be practiced at LAMC.

- One area of concern surrounded PACE’s schedule. This is a complex subject, and the committee spent considerable time attempting to unravel the issues. Several faculty members expressed a belief that PACE students struggled with the accelerated schedule, and that learning outcomes in PACE classes compare unfavorably to those from traditionally-scheduled classes. The committee recognizes that this was anecdotal evidence only; there was no good data allowing a comparison of outcomes for PACE and non-PACE students. But the belief in the superior educational success of traditional schedules was widespread enough to raise concerns among the committee members.

There is a fair amount of research that seems to indicate the opposite: that compressed schedules offer educational benefits when compared to traditional semester lengths. Complicating this issue is that PACE classes, while offering a compressed schedule, also feature fewer in-class instructional hours. (A typical PACE 3-unit class has 37 hours of in-class instruction; a typical non-PACE 3–unit class consists of 54 hours.)

PACE, as originally established, was limited to a single humanities track, and the 17 fewer instructional hours were to be spent viewing online course material offered by the Annenberg Foundation. But when PACE expanded from humanities to a variety of other programs, it lost the advantage of well-matched online course material. It became the responsibility of individual instructors to find meaningful assignments outside of class to fill the mandated extra 17 hours non-class instruction, and some faculty pointed to this as a weakness, believing that few quality alternative assignments existed.

Thus if faculty are correct in their belief that PACE offers inferior educational outcomes (and the committee believes that enough faculty members expressed this belief to at least raise the question), it may be the result of fewer in-class hours rather than the 5-week semester.

ANSWERS TO THE 8 SPECIFIC QUESTIONS THE COMMITTEE WAS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS:

1. Recent Program Review or accrediting agency recommendations

   There is no accrediting agency. Program Review goals in 2011 were:

   i. Clarify the definition and identification of PACE program and students
   ii. Establish a comprehensive advisory board
   iii. Define the mission and goals for the program
   iv. Address the need for solid data (e.g. students in each track, completion of the program, transfer)
   v. Clarify visions for change and growth
   vi. Clarify how PACE supports the mission of the college
   vii. Pursue closer collaboration with department chairs regarding scheduling and staffing
   viii. Continue exploring marketing strategies such as brochures and a website
   ix. Pursue development of resource s and orientation for PACE instructors

   Based on the most recent updates to PACE’s Program Review, several of these recommendations remain unresolved.
2. Measures of student demand
   i. PACE is primarily a provider of alternative scheduling, not unique degrees: all of the tracks offered through PACE can be completed by taking traditionally-scheduled classes. So this Committee decided to focus strictly on the demand for the unique aspects of the PACE program.
   ii. Even this has been a challenge. In its 2009 Program Review, PACE expressed concern over declining class size, and noted a decrease in demand for the largest track, elementary education. Since then, PACE classes have increased in size. But it is difficult to assess how much this represents student demand for PACE and how much it reflects the growing demand across the board evident since the college began cutting classes in response to budget declines five years ago. Further complicating this issue is that, partially in response to the declining PACE enrollment in 2009, PACE classes have, since that time, been cross listed with regular department offerings in the schedules, resulting in the attraction of students from the general student population. This mixing has made it difficult to differentiate “PACE students” from the general student population, and this is one of the reasons for the recommendations from the 2011 Program Review to “clarify the... identification of PACE...students,” and to “address the need for solid data (e.g. students in each track, completion of the program, transfer).” The inability to identify “PACE students” has made separating the demand for PACE classes from the generalized demand for classes difficult.

3. Measures of labor-market demand
   PACE offers five different tracks (Social Sciences and Human Services; Business; Elementary Education; Health Science; and a general program designed to prepare students for transfer to the UC system regardless of major). Demand for some of these tracks remains strong (business and health sciences, for example, are fields sustaining high growth) while others are mixed. But again, this represents demand for these various degrees as opposed to the PACE program (scheduling, cohorts, etc.). The labor market does not differentiate between PACE and non-PACE students.

4. Measures of demand in the service area
   No significant difference from the answer to question #4.

5. Current program effectiveness (including a cost vs. benefits analysis)
   The consensus of the committee is that PACE offers some attractive components.
   - The alternative scheduling to meet the needs of working adults seems to have been the most popular part of the program based attendee responses in the Open Forum held by the Viability Committee. This includes the evening & alternate-Saturdays schedule and the fact
that PACE classes, by requiring 17 fewer in-class hours than traditional classes, could offer completion of 48 units over two years. The Committee values the alternative scheduling aspect of PACE, but the inability to clearly identify PACE students makes it difficult to determine how many students need this schedule. Moreover, the second aspect of PACE scheduling—the 17 fewer in-class hours—received criticism from many of the instructors and department chairs surveyed, who expressed the belief that alternative assignments were not as valuable as in-class instruction.

- The track system designed to ensure students take only those classes needed for transfer is highly desirable. But this is not unique to PACE: it is mirrored in the new transfer degrees being adopted by the college.
- The cohort approach to education seems valuable to the Committee, however that aspect of the program seems to have been minimized in LAMC’s programs due to the special circumstances there (the school’s small student population, and more recently, growing enrollment in PACE classes by members of the general student population), and may not be possible at a school this small.

Ultimately, however, the Committee concludes that difficulties with the PACE program (the fewer in-class hours; the difficulty of maintaining a cohort system, and of filling tracked classes, with a student population as small as LAMC’s), coupled with the contractual requirement to maintain a full-time PACE director, and the ability to provide many of the beneficial parts of PACE (alternative scheduling and a clear path to transfer) in other ways, mean that costs of the program outweigh the benefits.

6. Outside expert opinion

N/A

7. Projected impact on overall educational program, students, faculty, college budget, community

The fact that PACE offers no courses unique to the program mitigates the negative impact its cessation would have. The Committee foresees no significant net impact on the educational program, faculty, or community. Students will have access to the same classes, and with adequate support from counseling, should be able to essentially mirror the PACE program through traditionally-scheduled courses. The largest negative impact will be to fully-employed students, who will likely not be able to complete their transfer requirements in two years. In exchange, the college budget will be positively impacted, as it will no longer be required to support a full-time director and support staff.