# The Financial Basis for No Lapse Universal Life Insurance 

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#### Abstract

Universal Life Insurance was developed during the early 1980’s. With calculated premiums based on historically high current interest rates and reduced mortality cost assumptions, Universal Life Insurance offered significantly lower premiums relative to Traditional Cash Value Insurance. However, as interest rates fell back to long-term historical averages, the original premium was insufficient leading Universal Life Insurance policies to lapse. Disgruntled policy owners sued insurers in multiple class action lawsuits and individual litigation claiming the insurance companies had used unrealistic projections of future interest rates in their illustrations.

No Lapse Universal Life Insurance was created in the mid 1990’s in response to policyholder concerns. This paper identifies the financial basis for No Lapse Universal Life Insurance and suggests the current interest rate and reduced mortality cost assumptions used for the original Universal Life Insurance product are effectively the same. However, No Lapse Universal Insurance may be seen as a mirror image of the original Universal Life Insurance product which may explain the disparate description of No Lapse Universal Life Insurance as both permanent term and whole life insurance. Where the original UL product used the reduced assumptions for non-guaranteed projected values, the NLUL uses the reduced assumptions for a shadow account providing the no lapse guarantee.


## Introduction

The No-Lapse Universal Life (NLUL) product offered in the mid 1990's is a fundamental change from the original Universal Life (UL) developed during the early 1980's, yet the financial basis remains the same. Assumption of higher credited interest rates and lower mortality charges provides significantly lower UL and NLUL premiums compared to traditional Whole Life ‘Cash Value’ insurance products.

The fundamental change but same financial basis may explain the disparate description of NLUL as a 'Whole Life product in disguise' (Nisbet, 1997) and as a 'Term to 100 contract' (Pinkans, 2002). Examining the financial basis of NLUL is provided in four steps. First, a
spreadsheet model - Applied Life Insurance Illustrator used for the analysis is described. Second, the financial basis for the original UL product is identified. Third, the financial difficulties with the original UL product are discussed. Fourth, the financial basis of NLUL will be considered. A final section provides a summary of the findings.

## Applied Life Insurance Illustrator

The Applied Life Insurance Illustrator, the Excel ${ }^{1}$ spreadsheet for considering the financial basis for NLUL as well as UL, simultaneously creates life insurance policy values for traditional, participating, interest-sensitive whole life, as well as universal life insurance policies (Jones, Lange and Simkins, 2003). The Applied Life Insurance Illustrator provides comparative life insurance policy value determination methods, policy premium strategies, impact of cash value factors, and insurer policy designs. The spreadsheet requires minimal data input, yet accommodates interest rate scenario pricing (Carr and French, 1989), IRS Code 26 Section 7702 requirements, varying surrender charges, premium fees, and expenses; current and guaranteed cost of insurance; multiple CSO tables; modal premiums; and premium contingent valuations including reduced or vanishing premium strategies (Lange, Himes and Jones, 2003).

Exhibit 1: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Input and Output includes policy base information [Cell Reference]:

| Death Benefit [B2] | $=\$ 300,000$ |
| :--- | :--- |
| Gender [C2] | $=$ Male |
| Age [D2] | $=30$ |
| Rate Class [F2] | $=$ Standard |
| Guaranteed Interest Rate [D5] | $=4.0 \%$ |
| Current Interest Rate [J5] | $=11.0 \%$ |
| Policy Expense [N2] | $=\$ 50.00$ |
| Policy Premium Fee [N5] | $=7.5 \%$ |
| CSO Table [C5] | $=1958$ |

[^0]Other DATA inputs such as PUA Dividend Option [H5], Mortality Cost Adjustment [Q5] and Expense Dividend [P5] are beyond the scope of the present paper, but reflect the flexibility of Applied Life Insurance Illustrator. The beginning CSO table is the 1958 table as the original UL policy was generally based on the 1958 CSO Table, but quickly changed to the 1980 CSO Table. Similarly the NLUL product was based on the 1980 CSO Table, but changed to the 2001 CSO table.

Exhibit 1: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Input and Output [Column, Cell Reference] includes premium and valuation information for Traditional, Participating, and Interest-Sensitive whole life, and [C] insurance is added for guaranteed whole life and the annual dividend [G] for participating whole life. All premium and valuation data are automatically calculated, given the policyholder and policy input assumptions. Universal life insurance requires the Guideline Premium [P2] be entered as the beginning universal life premium [M2].

The life insurance policies are ordered by the underlying actuarial valuation method (see Black \& Skipper, 2000; Bowers, Gerber, Hickman, Jones and Nesbitt, 1997; Jordan, 1991). The Prospective premium determination and policy valuation method used for Traditional and Participating whole life (see application example, Lange and Jones, 2004). The Retrospective method used for Interest-Sensitive whole life and Universal Life (see application example, Lange and Simkins, 2003, 2001). Supporting worksheets are listed along the bottom of the Exhibits.

Exhibit 2: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Assumptions contains the base information including, Interest Rate Scenario [AB], 1958 CSO [AE], 1980 CSO Male [AF] and Female [AG], 2001 CSO Male [AH] and Female [AI], Adjusted Current \% COI -Cost of Insurance for Male [AJ] and Female [AK], IRS Code 26 Section 7702 minimum death benefit or cash corridor requirements [AO], and Surrender Charge [AR]. The Current Mortality Charge for the standard rate class is set to $60 \%$, preferred $30 \%$ and smoker $150 \%$ of the guaranteed rate. The standard rate class reflects the median percentage rate $60 \%$ from Gold $(1993,1994)$ to age 60 , then equal to age, for example age 62 equals $62 \%$, 71 equals $71 \%$, and so on, analogous to select and ultimate mortality probabilities.

## UL Financial Basis

Life insurance premiums for UL and other interest sensitive products are subject to a guideline maximum premium as defined by the IRS Code Title 26, Chapter 79, Section 7702. The guideline maximum premium is based on the prospective method for premium and cash value determination, or at issue, the present value of expected premiums is equal to the present value of the expected death benefits.

Referring to Exhibit 1: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Input and Output, the original UL premium [M2] is the Guideline Premium [P2] = \$3,721.96. Given the assumptions of higher interest rates and lower mortality charges however results in almost bizarre Projected UL cash values [P] and death benefits [Q], with $\$ 1,077,877$ and $\$ 1,293,452$ respectively at age 65 . By age 80, the cash values and death benefits are approximately $\$ 5$ million on a $\$ 300,000$ face value policy.

The UL planned premium calculation uses the retrospective method in which projected cash values and death benefits are based on current interest rates and mortality charges. The use of current interest rates higher than the guaranteed interest rate, and current mortality charges less than the guaranteed mortality charges in determining the UL planned premium results in a lower premium than the traditional whole life level premium. The minimum UL periodic premium would be just sufficient to continue the policy to the next premium payment, paying the cost of insurance and expenses, or financially equivalent to a term insurance premium.

Exhibit 3: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Universal Life demonstrates the significant premium reduction given an assumed $11 \%$ current interest rate and current mortality charges, UL Planned Premium [M2], \$898.08, versus the Whole Life Annualized Premium [G2], \$3,384.10. The UL planned premium is calculated by selecting a cash value at a specific age and solving for the required premium using the Excel Data - What-if Analysis - Goal Seek Tool. For example, setting the cash value at age 80 [P33] to $\$ 300,000$, the face value of the policy, by changing the UL Planned Premium [M2] results in an $\$ 898.08$ planned premium. The cash values and death benefits are impressive even with this significantly reduced premium, as the policy is effectively endowed at age 80 , and provides $\$ 500,000$ or more by age 85 . By age 90 , the cash value and death benefits are over $\$ 800,000$.

The $11 \%$ current interest rate was the 1985 UL interest rate, Figure 1: UL Median Credited Interest Rates below (Best's Policy Reports - 2000). The 11\% current rate reflected the early 1980’s interest rate experience as shown in Figure 2: Life Insurance Industry 1985 Median

Figure 1. UL Median Credited Interest Rates


UL Illustrated Rate and Historical AAA Bond Yields 1919-1984 \& 1985-2007. The AAA Bond Yield hit its highest point of 15.49 percent in September 1981. Just after reaching its highest point, the rate fell by over 2.5 percent in the next twelve months. AAA Bond yields were relatively flat for most of 1983, varying within a 100 basis point range and averaging 12.04 percent. As shown in Figure 2, 1984 was a period of increased AAA Bond Yield variation, rising from 12.20 percent in January, peaking at 13.55 percent in June, and declining to 12.13 percent by December.

Including a $1.5 \%$ spread on investments returns required an actuarial projection of $12.5 \%$ for the policy to perform as illustrated to maturity, up to 95 years.

Mortality charges contribute to the UL financial basis in two ways. First, the use of the current mortality assumptions as a percentage of the guaranteed cost of insurance, CSO Table, $60 \%$ to age 60, and so on discussed above. Second, though the original UL policies often were based on the 1958 CSO Table, the 1980 CSO Table reduced rates were completely adopted by the late 1980’s. Referring to Table 1: 1958, 1980 CSO Table Cost of Insurance / $\$ 1,000$, this reduced the male cost of insurance at age 50 from $\$ 8.32$ per $\$ 1,000$ of death benefits to $\$ 6.71$.

The comparative female cost of insurance was $\$ 4.96$ (note: the 1958 CSO Table used a three year offset for females).

A yearly listing of cost of insurance rates is shown in Exhibit 4a: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - 1958, 1980, 2001 CSO Tables [Age 30-67] and Exhibit 4b: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - 1958, 1980, 2001 CSO Tables [Age 68-103]. The 2001 CSO Table goes out to age 120 creating a significant decline in cost of insurance rates between the ages of 95 and 100 , the 1958 and 1980 maturity age.

Table 1: 1958, 1980 CSO Table Cost of Insurance / \$1,000

| Age | 1958 CSO <br> Annual | 1980 CSO <br> Male <br> Annual | 1980 CSO <br> Female <br> Annual |
| :---: | ---: | ---: | ---: |
| 40 | 3.53 | 3.02 | 2.42 |
| 50 | 8.32 | 6.71 | 4.96 |
| 60 | 20.34 | 16.08 | 9.47 |
| 70 | 49.79 | 39.51 | 22.11 |
| 80 | 109.98 | 98.84 | 65.99 |
| 90 | 228.14 | 221.77 | 190.75 |

## UL Financial Difficulties

The use of the current interest rate in determining UL planned premiums ignored the financial effect from expected future interest rates and disregarded the underlying financial basis of life insurance policy valuation. First, annual premium payments are expected future cash flows, which prevents the application of immunization strategies. Second, UL (Type A) is a decreasing term insurance policy. The amount of insurance at risk is equal to the death benefit minus the policy accumulation value. If interest rates decrease, less interest is earned and the accumulated cash value is less. This requires a greater amount of insurance to be purchased and thus a higher mortality charge, leading to reduced cash values, further decreases interest earnings and so on.

The decline in market interest rates, Figure 2: Life Insurance Industry 1985 Median UL Illustrated Rate and Historical AAA Bond Yields 1919-1984 \& 1985-2007, resulted in a
corresponding decline in UL interest rates, Figure 1: UL Median Credited Interest Rates above. Casual review of Figure 2 would suggest there is little historical support for projecting a 12.5 percent return on investments in 1985. Life insurance policy illustrations based on current interest rates project the current interest rate for the life of the policy, up to 95 years for a new born. Interest rates were clearly high by historical standards during the early 1980's. The average AAA Bond Yield from 1919 to 1984 was 5.34 percent. Since 1919, interest rates never reached 12.5 percent until March of 1980, when that month's average was 12.96 percent. Monthly rates stayed above 12.5 percent for 34 of the next 58 months, through December 1984. During this time period, the median monthly average was 12.73 percent.

Exhibit 5: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Yearly Rates demonstrates the financial impact on UL cash values with the decline in interest rates. Instead of a UL policy with $\$ 87,926$ in cash value at age 65, Exhibit 3: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Universal Life, the policy Lapses. To avoid having the policy lapse prior to maturity policyholders were required to significantly increase premiums (Lange, Himes, Jones, 2003). Recall the UL premium had been reduced from $\$ 3,384.10$ to $\$ 898.09$ based on the interest rate and mortality cost assumptions.

Failure of life insurance policies to perform as illustrated resulted in sizable class action litigations against insurers, with some settlements, including MetLife, of over $\$ 1$ billion in estimated policyholder benefits (Scism, 1998; Lohse, 1999). MetLife’s position however was "MetLife contends this lawsuit is about Policy and Annuity owners’ disappointed expectations resulting from economic changes over which neither MetLife nor its customers had any control" (MetLife Notice of Class Action). The MetLife statement raised the issue of whether the failure of life insurance illustrations to be realized is a question of "disappointed expectations," or unrealistic projections. The early 1980's interest rates were historically high, over twice the average historical level as noted. Thus the 1985 MetLife UL life insurance illustrations explicitly projected the continuation of the previous 5 years of high interest rates seen to maturity of the policy, 65 years for a 30 year old.

For example, the 1985 MetLife \$100,000 Universal Life policy illustration for a female age 35 , based on a current interest rate of $11 \%$ and a $\$ 1,000$ per year policy premium, provided a \$150,794 cash value @age65 (A.M. Best's Flitcraft Compend, 1985). The decline in credited interest rates from the 1985 projection resulted in the 1985 illustrated financial results not being
realized. By 1994, the illustrated MetLife Universal Life cash value @age 65 for a 35 year-old female had fallen to $\$ 56,692$, based on an interest rate of 5.25 percent (A.M. Best's Flitcraft Compend, 1994). The UL policy expected cash value @age 65 had declined by approximately $\$ 94,000^{2}$ from the 1985 illustrations. So instead of a paid-up policy @age 65 with death benefits greater than $\$ 150,000$, the policyholder would need to pay higher premiums. ${ }^{3}$

## NLUL Financial Basis

NLUL was created in the mid 1990's, indirectly or directly, in response to UL lapse problem detailed above. The No-Lapse Guarantee directly counteracted the financial problems with the original UL product and as a result re-established policyholder consideration and confidence in the NLUL advancement to UL (West, 1998; Stevick, 2008). In a study by Panko (2006), based on the percentage change from the first quarter 2005 to 2006 UL was "helped markedly by sales of no-Lapse UL" causing UL to prominently lead in annualized premiums, face amount and number of policies.

The NLUL financial basis is shown in Exhibit 6: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - No Lapse Universal Life. Notice the UL - Guaranteed cash value [M] and death benefits [N] go to zero by age 70 causing the UL policy to Lapse based on the guaranteed interest rate of 4\% [D5] and the 2001 CSO Table guaranteed cost of insurance [C5]. More importantly note the UL Projected [P9] has had "Shadow Account" added above it [P8], and the cash value at age 100 [ P 41 ] equals $\$ 1,000$ and death benefit [Q41] is $\$ 300,000$. Based on the current interest rate of $7 \%$ [J5] and the 2001 CSO Table current cost of insurance [C5] the UL policy continues in-force to age 100 .

The NLUL financial basis is the use of current interest rate and reduced mortality cost assumptions, ironically and perhaps disturbingly similar to the original UL financial basis. But there is a distinct difference between UL and NLUL at least with respect to the current interest rate. Rather than a projected interest rate based on a period of historically high interest rates, the NLUL current interest rate reflects a long term expected investment return, $7 \%$ versus $11 \%$.

[^1]The UL and NLUL current mortality cost assumptions are quite similar. The original 1980's UL assumed lower mortality cost than the 1958 CSO Table, and subsequently benefited from the 1980 CSO Table, the above Table 1: 1958, 1980 CSO Table Cost of Insurance /\$1,000. The NLUL assumed lower mortality cost than the 1980 CSO Table, and subsequently benefited from the 2001 CSO Table, see Table 2: 1980, 2001 CSO Table Cost of Insurance / $\$ 1,000$ below. For example, the cost of insurance per $\$ 1,000$ of death benefits for a male at age 60 declined from $\$ 16.08$ on the 1980 CSO Table to $\$ 10.40$ with the 2001 CSO Table. For a female at age 60, the decline was from $\$ 9.47$ on the 1980 CSO Table to $\$ 8.34$ with the 2001 CSO Table. Referring to Table 2 for additional ages reveals the degree, often sizeable, by which cost of insurance rates declined from the 1980 CSO to 2001 CSO Tables.

Table 2: 1980, 2001 CSO Table Cost of Insurance /\$1,000

| Age | 1980 CSO <br> Guaranteed <br> Male <br> Annual | 2001 CSO <br> Guaranteed <br> Male <br> Annual | 1980 CSO <br> Guaranteed <br> Female <br> Annual | 2001 CSO <br> Guaranteed <br> Female <br> Annual |
| ---: | ---: | ---: | ---: | ---: |
| 40 | 3.02 | 1.72 | 2.42 | 1.34 |
| 50 | 6.71 | 3.91 | 4.96 | 3.24 |
| 60 | 16.08 | 10.40 | 9.47 | 8.34 |
| 70 | 39.51 | 26.94 | 22.11 | 18.63 |
| 80 | 98.84 | 74.02 | 65.99 | 46.43 |
| 90 | 221.77 | 194.28 | 190.75 | 124.22 |

The reduction in cost of insurance is the financial basis for one other distinctive change between the UL and NLUL, the change in maturity from age 95 to age 100. The 1958 CSO and the 1980 CSO Tables financially precluded a reduced policy premium which required UL ultimate cost of insurance rates for ages 96 to 98 at $\$ 375$ to $\$ 650$ per $\$ 1,000$ of death benefits. By definition, the $\$ 1,000$ cost of insurance per $\$ 1,000$ of death benefits was at CSO Table maturity. Referring to Table 3: 1980, 2001 CSO Table Cost of Insurance / \$1,000 - Age 95+, the 2001 CSO Table was extended to age 120 and the corresponding reduction in cost of insurance rates for ages 95 to 102 are obvious, allowing the NLUL to be extended to age 100 and older. For example, for a male (female) age 98, cost of insurance declined from \$657.98 to \$329.95 (\$655.85 to \$247.79) respectively.

Table 3: 1980, 2001 CSO Table Cost of Insurance /\$1,000 - Age 95+

| Age | 1980 CSO <br> Guaranteed <br> Male <br> Annual | 2001 CSO <br> Guaranteed <br> Male <br> Annual | 1980 CSO <br> Guaranteed <br> Female <br> Annual | 2001 CSO <br> Guaranteed |
| :---: | ---: | ---: | ---: | ---: |
| 95 | 329.96 | 276.12 | 317.32 | Female <br> Annual |
| 96 | 384.55 | 292.95 | 375.74 | 225.48 |
| 97 | 480.20 | 310.86 | 474.97 | 240.07 |
| 98 | 657.98 | 329.95 | 655.85 | 247.79 |
| 99 | $1,000.00$ | 350.32 | $1,000.00$ | 263.98 |
| 100 | 0 | 369.76 | 0 | 285.02 |
| 101 | 0 | 386.96 | 0 | 307.89 |
| 102 | 0 | 405.25 | 0 | 333.06 |

Exhibit 6: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - No Lapse Universal Life also demonstrates a very strict policyholder financial obligation for the "Shadow Account" and no-lapse guarantee, all premiums must be paid and on time, as the policy in-force standing is a function of the NLUL "Shadow Account", not the guaranteed values. Flexible premium payments associated with the UL policy are not permitted as even the most minor deviation in premium payment history would cause the "Shadow Account" to go to zero.

The fact that the NLUL lapses based on guaranteed values by a traditional actuarial valuation method supports concerns about NLUL funding. Katt (2004) suggests the NLUL may be partially funded by increased policy lapse assumptions. Goldwasser (2005) notes the NLUL sensitivity to premium payment amounts and timing, even small changes in amount or delayed payments can impact the NLUL no-lapse guarantee. Stevick (2008) raises a somewhat counter concern to the above NLUL financial basis, the NLUL may have a lower credited interest rate and higher cost of insurance to support the no-lapse guarantee. A final concern about the appropriate reserves given the violation of traditional actuarial valuation methods is beyond the scope of the paper, but should be noted.

## Summary

This paper examines the financial basis of No Lapse Universal Life (NLUL) insurance using the Applied Life Insurance Illustrator spreadsheet model. Overall, the lower mortality and higher interest rate assumptions used as the financial basis for NLUL are effectively the same as for the original Universal Life (UL) insurance product.

The reduction in mortality rates from the 1980 CSO to 2001 CSO tables support NLUL reduced premiums just as the decrease from the 1958 CSO to 1980 CSO tables provided lower premiums for the original UL product. The 2001 CSO expansion to age 120 from 100, also allows the reduced premium strategy to be extended to age 100 and beyond for NLUL.

However, No Lapse Universal Insurance may be seen as a mirror image of the original Universal Life Insurance product which may explain the disparate description of No Lapse Universal Life Insurance as both permanent term and whole life insurance. Where the original UL product used the reduced assumptions for non-guaranteed projected values, the NLUL uses the reduced assumptions for a shadow account providing the no lapse guarantee.

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Exhibit 1: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Input and Output


Exhibit 2: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Assumptions


Exhibit 3: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Universal Life



Exhibit 4a: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - 1958, 1980, 2001 CSO Tables (AGE 30-66]


Exhibit 4b: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - 1958, 1980, 2001 CSO Tables (AGE 67-103]


Exhibit 5: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - Yearly Rates


Exhibit 6: Applied Life Insurance Illustrator - No Lapse Universal Life



[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ Excel is a registered trademark of the Microsoft Corporation.

[^1]:    ${ }^{2}$ The actual decline in accumulation values $(\$ 150,794-56,692=94,000)$ is dependent on the interest credited in the intermediate years.
    ${ }^{3}$ Though generally not the case with the A.M. Best sample premium values based on the $\$ 1,000$ premium, a sizable premium increase would be necessary to prevent the policy from lapsing [Lange, Himes \& Jones, 2003].

