

Faculty Representative Mary Gilly
Remarks to the Board of Regents
May 2015

Thank you, Chair Varner, for this opportunity to address the Regents on behalf of the Academic Senate.

Today, I'd like to talk about the University of California's value of excellence. Values are a matter of culture. Anthropologists tell us that cultural values have always come to us from three main institutions – family, religion and school. Most recently, the media has been recognized as a major influence. And, you might include government and corporations as well.

To what extent do these six institutions promote excellence? Religion rewards piety. The media and government reward popularity. Corporations demand profits. The family sometimes rewards excellence, but unfortunately, not always. School is the only institution that consistently demands excellence. As the highest level of "school" in the state, the University of California serves as an incubator of intellectual excellence for its undergraduate and graduate academic and professional students.

Much of California's excellence is rooted in the University of California. The SacBee editorial board calls it "an academic treasure, a font of skilled workers, a research engine, a mission, a bargain, a shot at social mobility." In 2009, the New York Times called the University of California, "a crown jewel of education." Californians take justifiable pride in UC; just look at all the people who come to public comment proudly wearing shirts bearing the logo of one of the UC campuses.

The key to the University of California's excellence is the faculty. UC faculty members have received 62 Nobel prizes and 61 National Medals of Science. As of June, 2013, UC faculty included 61 MacArthur "Genius" Grant recipients, 286 members of the National Academy of Sciences, and 410 members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. And a quick search of the *New York Times* Science and Health section just for the past 30 days retrieves 19 articles that cite UC faculty on topics as varied as dinosaurs and the distribution of Medicare prescription drug usage between generics and brand-name pharmaceuticals. So what attracts that caliber of faculty to the University of California?

You can think of the University of California as a brand. I've mentioned Professor Emeritus Dave Aaker of UC Berkeley before; he's the guru of branding, something I teach. By the way, I just

learned he is being inducted into the NY AMA Marketing Hall of Fame this week due to his contributions to the brand, marketing and business worlds. How cool is that? Dave says the essence of a brand is the values and priorities it represents, what the organization considers important. Research indicates that people want to associate with organizations they respect and admire. For scholars who want to be the very best in creating and transmitting knowledge, UC represents commitment to their values of intellectual achievement.

It is useful to look at the University's Academic Personnel Manual's description of what UC expects from its professors. It says, "*Superior intellectual attainment, as evidenced both in teaching and in research or other creative achievement, is an indispensable qualification for appointment or promotion to tenure positions.* Insistence upon this standard for holders of the professorship is necessary for maintenance of the quality of the University as an institution dedicated to the discovery and transmission of knowledge." These high expectations are challenging to meet, but they are known to anyone applying for a position in UC, or being considered for promotion and tenure.

These standards are a magnet for people who want to change the way we understand the world – whether in deep space, in microbes, or in the Central Valley. They mean that UC faculty will be supported to do their best possible work in research and in the classroom, that they will work with colleagues who are the best in their fields, and that they will teach students who are excited by new knowledge.

But some people are now questioning UC's emphasis on excellence. They say faculty only care about prestige, selectivity and rankings. I would argue that faculty care about the attributes of UC that lead to prestige, selectivity and rankings. We take pride in the quality of the research led by UC faculty and conducted with graduate and undergraduate students. We are pleased when our alumni and peers evaluate UC's quality of education highly. The increasing selectivity of UC's undergraduate admissions is a function of an increase in applications at a time when the state hasn't wanted to support increased enrollment. The faculty are not happy about this and would prefer to accommodate more California residents. We worry about the increasing faculty-student ratio not because it lowers our rankings but because it lessens the ability of faculty to connect with students as individuals.

In November, 2014, the LA Times Editorial Board described the debate over funding for UC as a "battle for UC's soul." They wrote, "At issue is whether the 10-campus system will continue to rank among the nation's premier research universities, drawing top students and the best professors from throughout the world, or whether it will slowly shrink its ambitions, becoming a more utilitarian institution that concentrates narrowly on moving students to their bachelor's

degrees into the workforce quickly and efficiently.” The new budget “deal” announced last week doesn’t answer those questions yet. In the coming weeks, I expect to hear a lot from my faculty colleagues as the Academic Senate considers the deal’s implications, and it will be my job to convey my colleagues’ conclusions to President Napolitano.

In the meantime, I am concerned that an emphasis on speed and efficiency in the production of undergraduate degrees will change the UC brand. Faculty and students, who have sought to associate with the UC brand, may find other institutions that share their values for excellence in teaching, research and service if they perceive these values eroding at UC. As Professor Emeritus Aaker says, “Brand assets are difficult and expensive to develop, maintain, and adapt.” We still have a lot of work to do to protect the stellar UC brand with necessary long-term investment in our faculty, students, and infrastructure.

Chair Varner, this concludes my remarks. Thank you.