Notes From the Academic Senate Chair
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In this issue of The Senate Source I had intended to report on the work of a variety of special-function Academic Senate task forces and subcommittees. These ad hoc groups are addressing such concerns as UC health insurance and retirement programs, oversight of the national laboratories, faculty responsibility for course descriptions, etc. But as important as these activities of the Senate are, I will defer that column to the January 2003 issue.

Events of the past few days have suggested a far different focus for this column, the retirement of President Richard Atkinson. Taking the floor just prior to the midday break of the Regents’ meeting on Wednesday, November 13th, Atkinson announced that he would leave the presidency in October 2003. The timing of the announcement allows for a healthy period of time in which to seek his replacement. But replacing the current president, a superb scholar, and a talented and seasoned academic administrator, will not be an easy job.

During his seven years at the top of the UC organizational chart, Atkinson has successfully managed all manner of institutional challenges. UC Merced, the first new UC campus in nearly four decades, has been founded and is scheduled to open in fall 2004. Eight of the ten current UC Chancellors were recruited under his direction. He has also initiated and shepherded myriad enhancements to our research and service missions to the State of California, the nation and indeed, the world. These include, but are not limited to, the Industry-University Cooperative Research Program, which promotes partnerships with industry in fields that are essential to the California economy, and the California Institutes for Science and Innovation, an initiative that will put new multi-campus research programs at the forefront of emerging ideas in science and technology. And to serve the K-12 educational mission of the State, President Atkinson has overseen a variety of very successful UC programs that enhance professional development for teachers and thereby enrich the educational experience of the students they teach.

But no area of his accomplishments will likely be remembered more than his effect on UC admissions. These policies have evolved

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over the past five years in several directions, each of which has enhanced opportunities for the students of California to attend the University. The President has worked closely with the Academic Senate on our analyses of admissions policies and recommendations for change. During his tenure, and with his full support and that of the Board of Regents, we have changed the relative weights of the components in the “eligibility” formula (to enhance its predictive validity), we have added Eligibility in Local Context (to offer admission to the top 4% of students at each high school), we have launched comprehensive review (to equalize the breadth of the criteria applied to applicants in the “selection” process), and we have adopted the Dual Admission Program (to encourage transfer of community college students to UC). And, perhaps his greatest individual contribution to the admissions dialogue, is that President Atkinson, a cognitive scientist with exceptional credibility on the subject of “testing,” called upon the entire nation to rethink the content and role of entrance exams. While the Academic Senate is still at work on a variety of admissions-related questions, including reform of the SAT I, we can thank President Atkinson for his encouragement of our vigilance in protecting both quality and access. The Academic Senate wishes Richard and Rita Atkinson well in the planning of the next chapter of their lives.

On October 25, 2002 over 1500 well-wishers gathered under a gleaming tent on the future site of the UC Merced campus to witness Carol Tomlinson-Keasey’s investiture as the school’s founding Chancellor. The academic procession was led by the Chair of the Universitywide Academic Senate Task Force on UC Merced, Peter Berck (UCB), who served as the grand marshal. Berck, together with UCM’s founding Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, David Ashley, headed the procession of over 180 academics and dignitaries. Members of the Senate’s Task Force on UC Merced, who are key advisors on the academic planning for the new campus, participated, as well as the past chair of the Task Force, Fred Spiess, (UCSD/SIO). (The Task Force is composed of faculty representatives from each of the nine UC campuses and from eight Standing Committees of the Academic Senate).

The “official party,” which included the Chairman of the Regents, the President of the University, the State Governor, and the Chancellor was led by the Academic Senate Chair, Gayle Binion, and the Senate Vice Chair, Lawrence Pitts. Senate Chair Binion offered official greetings on behalf of the UC Faculty. She noted that while rain had been in the forecast, the sun was shining brightly. “May this be an omen that the sun will always shine on UC Merced,” she said. A ceremonial groundbreaking followed the inauguration.

Opening in September 2004, UCM has raised nearly $30 million in private grants and endowments to date. For more information about the Senate’s role in the academic planning for UC Merced, go to: http://www.ucop.edu/senate/ucmerced/