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MICHAEL DRAKE, PRESIDENT
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Re: Sabbatical credits for UC faculty

Dear President Drake,

Thank you for supporting many of the key recommendations of the *Mitigating COVID-19 Impacts on Faculty (MCIF) Working Group Final Report* and sending your letter of July 28, 2022 to the Chancellors.

That said, we write to register our disappointment of your rejection of recommendation #4: Support for Faculty Success, described in the section of your letter that reads:

Campuses have established different practices for mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on sabbatical leaves and there is no reason that these practices be the same. Moreover, implementing a systemwide sabbatical credit program with retroactivity to AY 2019-20 would create a significant administrative and financial burden that appears unnecessary given that locations already have mechanisms in place, arising from campus consultation processes, to reward faculty for the dedicated work they engaged in to pivot to remote instruction or to address concerns about lost opportunities to take sabbatical leave.

As you know, when COVID-19 closed the campuses in February 2020, UC faculty pivoted on a dime from customary in-person to unfamiliar remote instruction. The faculty's quick action kept the educational mission of the University afloat. Teaching across the system resumed within days and enabled students to progress along their educational paths. As many have stated, the University would not be where it is today if that pivot had not been so successful. There were associated costs, however. What suffered most for faculty was the research mission. Many faculty were unable to access their research sites, and those teaching were unable to maintain their research at expected levels because of the great time and effort needed to instruct and to meet student needs. Many faculty also spent large amounts of time and effort, and sometimes personal funds, keeping their departments and labs functioning under the arduous conditions of the pandemic — a sacrifice that has largely fallen below the radar. The 2020-21 survey of the faculty, which we presented to UC Regents in July 2021, gave empirical ballast to the many challenges for faculty during this period.

The past 2-1/2 years have been difficult for the entire UC community and various efforts have been made by the University to support employees across the institution. As leaders of the faculty, it is incumbent upon us to inform you of problems among our ranks, particularly for early career, female, and underrepresented minority (URM) faculty, who, as we learned from our surveys, have had an especially difficult time meeting professional expectations during the pandemic. We appreciate that the new Achievement Relative to Opportunities (ARO) principles will help address some of these concerns. But it does not provide enough support, especially for early career faculty who are trying to establish their research programs and for female and URM faculty whose research was hit particularly hard during the pandemic due to great personal demands. In response, we proposed the idea of an extra sabbatical credit to recognize and appreciate the faculty's extraordinary teaching efforts and to aid them in reviving their research. The MCIF Working Group endorsed this proposal and included it as one of the recommendations in its final report.

We are repeating things you already know. What you may not know yet is how abandoned many faculty feel. Faculty believe they sacrificed for the students in time of need and that, now, the institution could provide more support to help them relaunch their research careers and restore their equipose. The 2021-22 survey of the faculty, which Senate Vice Chair Cochran is finalizing, reveals a faculty burned-out, stressed, anxious about the future, and feeling unappreciated. And many are worried that the University will enshrine the extended effort devoted to instruction during the pandemic going forward, while still expecting high levels of productivity and excellence in research and service. In the survey, the number of older, accomplished faculty contemplating early retirement is striking, and the number of younger, female, and URM faculty thinking of leaving UC or academia in general is deeply concerning. In short, additional sabbatical credit would convey a message of appreciation to faculty across the system and help revive research activity.

You write in your letter that, "Campuses have established different practices for mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on sabbatical leaves..." but according to Division Senate Chairs and Senate Executive Directors, this is not the case. To our knowledge, to date only at UCI has the Senate been working with the Vice Provost of Academic Personnel on a COVID mitigation program that is faculty-forward in terms of research support, including some form of sabbatical credit. UCD has initiated such a conversation. We have not heard that any of the other campuses are contemplating such support for their faculty.

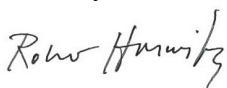
It is true that the extra sabbatical credit plan would entail some administrative burden, including validating who taught during the relevant terms. We also realize that the plan would not apply to our Health Sciences clinicians because of the nature of that employee series. We believe the clinicians (as well as other UC employees) who took on extraordinary work during the pandemic should be rewarded for their contributions to the institution. Notwithstanding that front-line clinicians might be recognized separately, such action should not prevent you from extending due support for research faculty, and additional sabbatical credit is one way to do so.

As with all actions taken by the University to ameliorate difficulties caused by the pandemic, it is unknown how much goodwill an extra sabbatical credit would secure. But we are certain that *not* recognizing faculty across the system in some way risks hardening the faculty's perception of the institution's inadequate appreciation of faculty contributions during the pandemic. Given the

uncertainties of the pandemic going forward, there may be further expectations of the faculty by the administration, which means now is not the time to sow seeds of disaffection. In our view, not awarding the sabbatical credit, especially after being recommended by the MCIF Working Group, is disheartening. It may also be short-sighted considering the survey's revelations of faculty contemplating departure from the UC.

In developing this and other mechanisms of faculty support, the Academic Council would be happy to work with the Provost on guidelines to insure that implementation is appropriate and equitable across the campuses. For instance, additional sabbatical credit could be reserved for faculty at particular career junctures, with certain needs, or whose research progress was demonstrably harmed by the pandemic. Other possible mechanisms, such as "pandemic fellowships," could provide teaching release for faculty whose research is in dire need of support at this time. We fear that without a signal from the systemwide Administration, one that recognizes the faculty's extra effort during the pandemic and its impact on the research enterprise, the faculty's ability to remain an engaged and willing part of the University's workforce may be in jeopardy.

Sincerely,



Robert Horwitz
Chair of the Academic Senate, 2021-22



Mary Gauvain
Chair of the Academic Senate, 2020-21

Cc: Chancellors
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Executive Vice Chancellors/Provosts
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