

Faculty Representative Mary Gilly
Remarks to the Board of Regents
September 2014

It is my honor to follow Bill Jacob as Academic Senate Chair and Faculty Representative to the Regents and I hope that Vice Chair Dan Hare and I can continue his successful efforts in shared governance.

This year, the voice of the Senate will be essential as the University takes on a number of important matters. Big issues that we see on the horizon are education quality and the legislature's accountability metrics; total remuneration for faculty as health care and retirement benefit contributions erode UC's salary competitiveness; restoring budget-driven cuts to central funding for faculty-driven multi-campus research; diversity and inclusiveness in the faculty ranks; enrollment management; doctoral student support; and university-industry relations.

All of these topics pose questions that can be answered only with the full participation of the Senate. I want to lay the groundwork for understanding the unique perspectives that faculty bring to bear when they participate in formal Senate consultation – and why that perspective is so critical in making good decisions about matters that affect the three-pronged academic mission of the University. I will do that by talking about why we become academics and what attracts us to the University of California.

The fundamental mission of the University of California is “to discover knowledge and to disseminate it to its students and to society at large.” What attracts faculty to careers in support of that mission is the ability to pursue ideas that might not be directly appealing to the world of commerce. I'm a business professor. In MBA classes, my colleagues and I teach students how to become innovative leaders who maximize profits by using skills such as creating integrated marketing communications; identifying legal ways for companies to minimize tax liabilities; and finding sources of capital for business expansion. And sometimes, but not always, my colleagues pursue these same issues in their research. The “not always” part of that statement is key. When I was an MBA student, I worked as a research assistant on my professor's academic research. Tom Barry involved me in honing the research question with appropriate theory, developing the data collection plan (including human subjects protection and informed consent), collecting and analyzing data, and figuring out what it all meant. I was hooked. I wanted to get a job doing market research. But I graduated into a recession, and firms were laying off market researchers, not hiring them. Professor Barry then made a suggestion that changed my life: “Why don't you go on and get a Ph.D.? That way, you can do the kind of research you want to do, not what your boss tells you to do.” So I did. And I was fortunate

enough to come to the University of California where the mission is “to discover knowledge.” Because pursuit of knowledge rather than profit maximization is the goal, I can engage in research that helps marketers do a better job and be more profitable, but I can also do research that helps consumers resist the temptations that marketers create or help regulators recognize predatory practices that harm consumers.

My colleagues in other fields are equally passionate about pursuing knowledge. This summer, I attended a production of Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” at UC Irvine’s New Swan Theater. Director Eli Simon decided to transfer the characters from the standard Elizabethan setting to the Roaring Twenties and old time Hollywood. The serious research on the play and on the new setting that was key went unnoticed as the audience was immersed in a magical, hyper-theatrical experience.

The Senate’s new Vice Chair, UC Riverside Professor Dan Hare, was fascinated by “coevolution” as it was explained in his undergraduate ecology and evolution class. Coevolution is the process by which one species imposes natural selection on another, causing the second species to evolve, and vice versa. His research has contributed to the discovery that plants are not passive victims in interactions with plant eaters; rather, they have some ability to actively defend themselves. Some of Dan’s early UC work in California’s citrus systems showed that well managed orange trees were more tolerant of a presumed pest than anyone thought, and that populations of this pest rarely reached densities that economically justified the application of pesticides. Chemical companies would not support research demonstrating that pesticides are not needed; a research university like UC is needed for the discovery of unbiased solutions.

There has been a lot of press coverage recently about the need for universities to capitalize on faculty and student research by looking for ways to commercialize ideas. Some faculty and students are eager to commercialize their discoveries. That said, we must not forget our primary mission to discover knowledge for its own sake. Fortunately for the UC, President Napolitano has been a leader in promoting the value of basic research. Recently, in her keynote address to the *New York Times* Schools for Tomorrow conference, she eloquently stated, “The future belongs to the thinkers, the dreamers, the innovators. The day is coming – check that, the day is here – when it is no longer enough to out-produce or out-harvest the world. We must also out-think it. We must dwell....in the realm of ideas.”

The Academic Senate echoes this call to dwell in the realm of ideas. We became academics because we have a passion to discover more about our subject than is currently known. We want to find out what happens when Twelfth Night meets the Roaring Twenties. We want to know if plants can fend off insects without pesticides. We want to help consumers make better

decisions. Our students must also participate in, to quote the Faculty Code of Conduct, “an environment conducive to sharing, extending, and critically examining knowledge and values, and to furthering the search for wisdom.”

Some of our ideas lead to big discoveries that cure disease, bring to light social injustice or cause our peers to consider a well-studied author in a completely new way. Other ideas may be “failures” in the sense that they do not achieve their original goals. But when anticipated successes based on past research and theory instead fail, that too contributes to knowledge. As every entrepreneur will tell you, the path to success is littered with failure, or as Thomas Edison put it, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”

Let me end with a quote from Neil deGrasse Tyson: “I’ve spend quality time in the aerospace community, with my service on two presidential commissions, but at heart, I’m an academic. Being an academic means I don’t wield power over person, place or thing. I don’t command armies; I don’t lead labor unions. All I have is the power of thought.”

The reason faculty are attracted to the University of California is that power of thought where our motto is “Let there be light.”