

## **Regents Remarks, January 2021 Meeting**

### **Mary Gauvain, Chair, UC Academic Senate**

Thank you, Chair Perez, and good afternoon everyone. As a faculty representative to the Board of Regents, my role is to bring you news from the campuses and about our systemwide efforts. Today I will focus on some lessons learned from the pandemic regarding faculty and student experience. I will also update you on several projects underway at the Senate.

We are in the 10<sup>th</sup> month of the pandemic stay-at-home orders. Or in terms of the academic calendar, it is the third quarter or semester since it began, and the faculty are teaching, and students are taking, their third set of courses remotely. I am sure you agree with me that the transition to remote instruction in March of 2020 was remarkable both in speed and competence. Yes, there have been some blips along the way, but it has worked out fairly well. I want to commend the faculty – they have done a great job in meeting this challenge. It is also important to recognize that during this period, the faculty have been the main touchpoint for the University for most of our students. As such, they enabled the University to fulfill its obligations to students for the last academic year, and they continue to do so this academic year. This is indeed good news for the University, but it has come at a cost to the faculty and it is greatly affecting morale.

These are dire times for everyone, so at the outset it is important to acknowledge how difficult it is to talk about the effects of a pandemic that has destroyed the lives and livelihoods of so many people. However, it is important that we understand what is happening to our employees – including members of the Academic Senate.

The personal impact on faculty is like what many of us have experienced. They, too,

have lost family members, friends, and long-time colleagues. As they go about their daily work, faculty also struggle to do what is right for their families and community. However, the ability of faculty to carry out work vital to our central mission of teaching and research has been greatly affected.

On the face of it, working from home might seem like it would give more time to work on classes and research, but this is not the case. Teaching in the context of COVID has been difficult. Class lectures, materials, activities, and exams need to be adapted. New ways to engage and support student learning are essential. Addressing student needs has been daunting. Students' anxieties and worries, and sometimes more serious mental health concerns, affect their class experience, and faculty are doing all they can to help students at this time.

The impact on research, which is the lifeblood of faculty teaching, creative activity, professional advancement, and external funding is particularly worrisome. When the campuses closed in March, libraries and archives, performance venues, and research sites, including most laboratories, were shuttered. This had an immediate effect on research productivity as well as the hands-on research experience for undergraduate and graduate students that is a hallmark of a UC education. It is true that some research can be conducted off-site, but most has been severely limited due to restricted campus access and the loss of the all-important face-to-face interactions that are critical to research.

The impact of this situation is compounded for faculty who are caregivers, many of whom are women, and for younger faculty, many from underrepresented groups, who are working hard to establish their research and professional careers. Thus, one thing we now

know is how quickly our decades-long efforts to increase the numbers of women faculty and faculty from underrepresented groups can come under threat.

We have also discovered much about student learning, especially how it is affected by remote instruction. In this work, we are collaborating with the Provost's Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning, or IRAP. The data compiled so far are clear: remote learning is adequate under the conditions of the pandemic, but very far from optimal. In fact, a majority of students and professors have expressed dissatisfaction with the remote experience. It is especially difficult for students with fewer resources at home and those who are struggling in their studies.

Now I want to update you on some other projects. The first pertains to student admission and enrollment. Early reports indicate that the number of applications this year are high and may even exceed those of last year for freshmen and transfer students. This is good news – the University of California remains in high demand for students seeking an undergraduate degree. But there is a downside. We cannot enroll as many students who want and deserve a seat in our classrooms – and the reason falls squarely on budgetary constraints. Right now, we teach all the students our budget allows both at the freshmen and transfer levels. We all know this is a difficult time for the budget, so we need to be thoughtful and creative in addressing this issue while at the same time continue to seek additional state funds.

Our current work on transfer will be helpful here. By the way, transfer is a topic near to my heart. Many years ago, I was fortunate to transfer to UCI, where I attained my bachelor's degree. The Senate is working with campus departments to streamline major preparation requirements for transfer students. We are also working with the Office of

Graduate, Undergraduate, and Equity Affairs about how to best communicate major prep information to students at the community colleges. Major preparation deepens students' understanding of their chosen field of study, readies them for upper division work immediately upon transfer, and allows them to graduate in two years. One key element is ensuring that students get the resources and advising they need about major preparation while they are at the community college.

Availability of additional resources, particularly for advising, will be especially helpful to students in underserved areas. Although some community colleges are doing a good job preparing students to transfer to the UC, these colleges tend to be in more affluent areas. If these resources were more widely available, community college students would be better served and transfer applicants, as well as admit pools, could better reflect the ethnic diversity of the state. On this and other transfer aims, we are working with Senate colleagues from the California Community Colleges. Finally, we are also discussing with the Provost's office the possibility of re-establishing in some form a Community College-UC dual admission program. A version of this program was launched over a decade ago, but lacked adequate state funding to be fully implemented.

Let me touch on two other projects. First, we are identifying and trying to change any practices that impede the recruitment, support, and retention of faculty, especially women faculty and faculty from underrepresented groups. Second, we are committed to advancing faculty involvement and leadership on the climate crisis. Here we are inspired by the Green New Deal at UCSD. Representatives from this group presented at the UC Global Climate Leadership Council in December, and Vice Chair Horwitz and I are working to extend their recommendations systemwide. These include changing the University's

climate goals from carbon neutral to fossil free, moving ahead more rapidly on electrifying the campuses, and developing a complete and transparent record of how each campus is addressing the climate crisis in capital projects and infrastructure, contracts and investments, and research and teaching.

On all the projects I described, we have been working closely with President Drake. We are heartened by his deep commitment to the faculty and student experience, social justice, and constructive action on the climate crisis.

In closing, it is fitting to mention what happened today on the national front. A new President and Vice President were sworn into office. They pledged to defend and protect the constitution and to work to heal this country and move us forward. Like many of you, this is the most recent of many inaugurations I've seen in my life, though it is definitely a unique one. As you know, I am a developmental psychologist and over the past few weeks, I have been wondering what this inauguration will mean to young people, both our current students and for children and young adolescents for whom this is their very first or, perhaps, the most significant inauguration of their lifetimes. This matters to us here because soon these young people will be applying to the University of California and sitting in our classrooms. So, I want to end with two questions: What are these young people learning now, both from the pandemic experience and about our society? And second, how might our work today give them hope for a brighter future? Chair Perez, this concludes my remarks.