

Academic Senate Chair Kum-Kum Bhavnani
Remarks to the University of California Board of Regents
July 29, 2020

Thank you Chair Pérez.

Like President Napolitano, this is my final set of remarks. On 1st September, Vice Chair Gauvain will assume the role of Chair, with Professor Horwitz from UCSD entering as the Senate Vice Chair.

The planet seems to be at an impasse.

Federal troops occupy the streets of Portland and Seattle, Los Angeles and Omaha, taking on protestors in a manner akin to that of dictatorships. They behave with ferocity towards people who merely wish to rid this country of its legacies of racist and murderous policing. Since we last met, the hate crime murder of George Floyd by a police officer who behaved with such impunity that he could keep his knee on the neck of a man until he died, watched, in silence, by his police co-workers. Such racist murders on the part of the police are not new. What is new is that it has catalyzed a moment when many people, the world over, often under the age of 35, are issuing clarion cries of “not in our space: not in our name”. In light of this, Academic Council has offered President Napolitano a set of recommendations on how, together, we could develop safe communities on campuses – safe for all members of the UC. The recommendations, to be implemented over three years include, amongst others, the banning of firearms as standard equipment for campus police, substantially decreasing funding for campus police and redistributing those funds to creating communities of safety without criminalising sections of campus communities.

At the same time as the practices of policing come under scrutiny, Covid continues apace, also in its cruel albeit non-human, ways. Despite the glimmers of hope from possible vaccine development, the spike in cases within California, and around the world, has meant that it is not at all clear when this pandemic might be forced to recede.

The Academic Senate still continues its work within the university on matters of educational quality, and testing/tracing.

This uncertainty and lack of predictability about the coronavirus does not make for easy decisions about how to re-populate campuses: how does one proceed to open up research labs? Is it better to have one undergraduate student per dorm room to minimize transmission via campus living and dining environments, or to have two undergraduates in each dorm room, with the goal of decreasing the number of UG students living off-campus, possibly in extremely dense housing conditions, who could become super-spreaders. UC researchers are working

around the clock to develop models to understand what possibilities are feasible, and also work together to understand how to offer the most effective testing and tracing regimens, allows us to have a glimpse into their dedication.

Many know of the pandemic of 100 years ago in which too many people died, their deaths following hard on the heels of the unnecessary deaths of those who were killed during the 1914-1918 war.

At the time of the previous pandemic, 100 years ago, the University of California, had started to develop shared governance within the university.

As a result of faculty demands for more power in relation to educational policy, as well as in the selection of a president for the UC, in June 1920, the Regents and the then President signed a formal agreement which created shared governance between the academic senate, the President and the Regents. This formal agreement included the idea that the Academic Senate would advise the UC President on faculty and administrative appointments and promotions, on educational policy, and on budget matters.

Some have suggested that it was in 1920, when the Regents recognized how knowledgeable the faculty were about running a university, that they saw the need to take advice from the faculty (through the Senate) on important issues. The Regents and the UC President were aware that it was through the faculty -- the Academic Senate -- that a university could be established which had a strong international recognition. In setting up this structure, the Regents came to rely on the faculty, alongside the President of course, for management of the university. It was at this time that the Regents began to shift away from micromanagement of the university to becoming a policymaking board.

While most agree that the academic senate was expected to advise the Regents on major policy changes, such as admissions criteria, it was also agreed that the responsibility of the Regents was to seek Senate's advice before making a decision. And it was evident to all that shared governance works best in an atmosphere of respect and with an understanding of the differing roles of faculty, students, administrators and Regents.

Last week, Vice Chair Gouvain and I were invited to have a discussion with Regents Park and Lieb last week about the recommendations in the report from the Chancellor Search Working Group, to be discussed later today. We are both very appreciative of that invitation. As both Regents noted, a Chancellor cannot be expected to lead a campus successfully without the full confidence of the faculty on that campus. We are in full agreement with them on that point. Members of the Board will likely have seen the 23rd July letter from the Academic Council on this matter. Council does, however, have some concerns about the report and recommendations.

Council is concerned that adoption of the report's recommendations could lead to a downgrade in the quality of new chancellors if the role of faculty in screening possible nominees is diluted. While there are a number of other concerns, the letter makes it clear that that we offer our comments in order to maintain the exceptional quality of the chancellors we presently have in the UC and this is more likely if campuses remain central in the making of such appointments. Council urges the Board to delay action on the report and its recommendations until Dr. Drake has assumed his position, and can share his views with the Board, the Senate and other university constituencies.

In closing...

Shared governance demands healthy, open discussion, without censorship, even when we all do not agree. Critique is essential for any society to move forward – and growth can only emerge from conflict.

Without critique, there is no argument
Without argument, there is no politics
Without politics, there is no democracy
And without democracy, we lose our humanity

Hágase la Luz.

Fiat Lux

Let There Be Light

Thank you, Chair Pérez. That concludes my remarks