



## Remarks to the UC Board of Regents

Steven W. Cheung, Chair of the Academic Senate

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Good morning, Regents, chancellors, faculty, students, staff, and other members of the University of California community. This is my last Regents meeting to deliver remarks as chair of the systemwide Academic Senate. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight several matters that will require attention through at least the next academic year, and to communicate reflections on current events from fellow Academic Council members.

In my September remarks, I highlighted the promise and allure of remote instruction to serve the changing and evolving needs of our students. A potential ambitious outcome of online education at the University is the creation of fully online undergraduate degree programs. Yet any major leap in this direction, even in pilot form, must be consonant with our shared expectations and assurances for quality and equity. With this in mind, the joint Senate-administration Presidential Task Force on Instructional Modalities & UC Quality Undergraduate Degree Programs articulated five principles to guide the development and implementation of online courses and programs. One is conferral of a single UC baccalaureate degree without a separate online designation. Another principle is equitable access to the UC ecosystem of academic programs, campus facilities, and support resources for undergraduates enrolled in any hybrid or fully online degree program. Following up on these guiding principles and prior work, a successor task force will soon be convened to develop recommendations for methods to monitor and assess the quality of undergraduate degree programs, with a particular emphasis on online programs, among other

objectives, and again will be a joint effort of the Senate and administration at both the campus and systemwide levels.

The sudden revocation of international student visas required urgent action by the Senate to ensure educational continuity and focused on those students nearing their degree completion. The standing systemwide Senate committees on Education Policy and Graduate Affairs analyzed relevant Senate regulations and reiterated that flexibilities are available in existing academic policy to support students in situations where in-person instruction is prohibited or infeasible. This Senate guidance addresses the dilemma of students being physically unable to receive instruction on a UC campus. It supports shifting to online courses that may or may not be offered by a student's home campus. Impediments to enrollment in University courses underscore the need for a systemwide policy framework to facilitate cross-campus course articulation and awarding of course credit. It would be useful to formulate processes to complement existing policy, or draft wholly new policy *as needed*, so that students can take advantage of courses offered by a particular UC campus to fulfill a specific major or degree requirement at any UC campus. Given the uncertainty surrounding our international student enrollments, one thing is clear, and that is the need for the University to be flexible in our course offerings and modalities.

The terminations and suspensions of federally funded research projects and dramatic reductions to the budgets of sponsoring agencies – NIH, NSF, NEA, to mention a few - have both near- and long-term impacts on faculty and trainees. In the near term, research work and trainee support are disrupted - some midstream - harming the more immediate academic productivity of faculty in various stages of their careers, and early career development of young scholars. In the long term, the University's fundamental mission to freely seek, discover, and disseminate new knowledge may be diminished, and the overall cadence of faculty academic progress decelerated. To address these concerns, the Academic Senate's special Task Force on UC Adaptation to

Disruptions, or UCAD, which the Academic Council formed at the end of April, will soon be issuing an interim report. A couple examples of the actionable recommendations include: 1) holistic and equitable approaches to faculty assessment over the next one or two academic personnel review cycles, with intentions to view faculty's career progression and achievements in the context of opportunities available and opportunities lost, and 2) institutional support for faculty researchers experiencing disruptions by implementing three complementary funding interventions. The first is bridge funding for research grants that are temporarily caught up in federal "stop work" orders but likely to be reinstated following brief delays or court actions. The second is transition funding to *ramp down* impacted research projects that have no likely prospects for reinstatement of extramural funding; such transition funding efforts are to mitigate potential harm to the careers of both faculty and trainees. And the third is research recovery funding to *ramp up* opportunities for impacted faculty to explore new directions in research. It is my hope the Senate and UCOP leaders will work together more closely moving forward to take concrete steps that would reduce near- and long-term harm to the functions and to the community members of the University.

Before I conclude, I would like to share thoughts from faculty colleagues who sit on the Academic Council with me and responded to my request for reflections on the year. One colleague highlights a major challenge that needs attention, which is, the public perception that the University is no longer upholding standards of a professional institution grounded in truth and objectivity. Some of the critics venture further and claim the University shelters biased actors engaged in political indoctrination of students. These sentiments are tough to overcome. A suggested countermeasure to halt and perhaps reverse erosion of public trust in higher education is formal University endorsement of institutional neutrality, as promulgated by the University of Chicago and adopted by a number of peer institutions. Another Academic Council member notes the threat to the core identity of UC as a research-intensive, Carnegie-recognized R1 university, in

view of recent and continuing federal defunding actions. World-class faculty research fuels cutting-edge instruction in the classroom and creates the knowledge engine that drives economic prosperity within California, across the nation, and beyond. The research-based model of teaching and service that UC provides is central to our mission. It is imperative that the multifaceted value of the University is communicated plainly and widely to the public at large and to policy makers.

Yet another Council member observes that while the University faces considerable ongoing challenges, it does so in the company of more than 26,000 capable and committed faculty members. These scholars possess deep expertise across a breadth of knowledge domains - including operationally critical areas, from finance and healthcare economics, to education policy and organizational governance - that should be harnessed and configured by the Board of Regents; Senate, administrative, and student leaders; and staff colleagues in an all-hands-on-deck collaborative effort to craft innovative solutions to urgent and serious problems confronting the University. Shared governance as a strategic necessity to navigate turbulent times has never been more essential.