

Remarks to the UC Board of Regents

Mary Gauvain, Chair of the Academic Senate

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Thank you, Chair Perez, and thank you for your service as Chair of the Board. Good morning everyone. For the last several months, Faculty Representative Horwitz and I have talked with faculty, students, and staff about plans for re-opening the campuses in fall. They have raised many questions and concerns, and based on this information, we developed a set of recommendations that was circulated on the campuses last week.

Our reason for offering this information is simple. We want the transition back to campus to be as successful as possible. We believe the way to do this is to address the concerns people have in advance. As leaders of the Academic Senate, we base our recommendations on the principle of shared governance, which is fundamental to the University. Many decisions about fall re-opening pertain to educational matters, and shared governance between faculty and administration requires serious and extensive consultation on decisions about education, even in times of crisis.

We understand that this planning is complex and will play out differently across the campuses, so our recommendations allow for campus flexibility. We also know that each of the campuses is actively engaged in this planning. We do not criticize these efforts, we're all in this together. But we do want to help by providing information from the faculty point of view. Today, I will give you an overview of our recommendations, the full description is on the Academic Senate website.

First and foremost is process. The University values decision making that is collaborative and respectful. This approach is especially important when difficult and wide-

reaching decisions are made. To this end, we strongly recommend that planning for fall has meaningful and ongoing involvement of faculty, students, and staff. Without such collaboration, the plans are likely to fail.

Our second recommendation is about mode of instruction, and it draws on what we have learned this past year. As we have discussed here before, the rapid and effective shift by faculty and instructors to remote instruction in March of 2020 was impressive, and it has continued successfully since that time. What is less well known is how difficult it has been. It has taken faculty and instructors substantial time and effort to adapt a course to this mode and use it productively throughout a term.

For this reason, we recommend that the options available for mode of instruction be limited in fall, and perhaps further into the academic year, and, importantly, that the default mode of instruction be in-person. We base our reasoning on the premise that by re-opening in fall, the University will soon get back to its normal footing. This means that as an in-person institution, the University will conduct its regular business, including teaching and research, with faculty, staff, and students physically present. As an aside, we all know that the nature and location of the workplace will be in great flux in the coming years. Here I am talking about fall re-opening of the campuses and not the future of the academy, which merits serious discussion in the coming years.

Back to fall planning, we understand that the situation in fall will be uncertain, and that flexibility in mode of instruction will be necessary. We already know that in-person instruction cannot always be accommodated due to classroom space limitations or public health guidelines. Mode of instruction also affects workload. It is especially time-consuming

and stressful for instructors to accommodate multiple modes in one course, often referred to as hybrid.

Flexibility should also encompass the question of how to support faculty, students, or staff who have well-founded, COVID-related hesitancy to return to campus. This includes faculty who want to teach a course remotely. These individuals should be given latitude for the fall term. But this latitude should not be extended beyond fall without a serious discussion within Departments, Divisions, and between the Senate and the Administration.

I want to comment directly on why the decision-making process regarding mode of instruction is important at the University. It is essential that faculty and instructors be able to choose, in consultation with their department head, the method of delivering course material, as well as the lectures and assignments used in the course. To remove or bypass this responsibility is a violation of academic freedom. We know there will be requests for flexibility in mode of instruction from individuals other than those teaching the course, including students and administrators. We understand their concerns. However, we are obligated at the University of California to consult with faculty on academic matters, and consultation is especially important when a decision pertains to different groups on the campus. All of us are under a lot of stress now, and we must guard against decisions that lower the stress for one group while raising it for another.

Our third recommendation pertains to research and creative activity. Laboratories, performance spaces, and other research areas should be re-opened sooner than fall. UC is a Research-1 institution, and it is the duty of the University to support research. This part of the faculty's work has suffered dramatically during the pandemic and full recovery of our research strength will likely take years. Younger researchers and those with caregiving

responsibilities have been hit especially hard. In addition, research support must apply to all faculty. We all do research, and it is important that the University does not prioritize some research over others. It is true that some fields generate tangible products of immediate and widespread societal value. Over this last year we have all benefitted from the ingenuity and sacrifice of researchers who brought us vaccines. But we must remember that in January a young woman named Amanda Gorman also helped to heal us when she read her poem *The Hills We Climb* at the presidential inauguration. My point is that we must not prejudge the worth of someone's scholarship, whether it comes from the lab or the studio or the library.

Our final recommendation is about day-to-day activity on campus. A smooth transition will require attention to many details in advance. Of particular concern are disruptions that can occur in the classroom that would affect the ability of the University to provide the instruction it prides itself on and the students pay for in tuition. We cannot overstate how important it is to plan for these concerns in advance. The added burden and stress for faculty, instructors, staff, and students if they are not addressed will jeopardize the success of any re-opening plans.

Operational details that require attention include the use of non-pharmaceutical interventions and the enforcement of these practices, including what will be done, for example, if a student in a class refuses to wear a mask or physically distance from classmates. Many people we spoke with want campus-wide practices and policies that include an explicit code of conduct, clear expectations regarding npi use, and information about the consequences of non-adherence. And, importantly, the identification of those

responsible for enforcing them must be clear and widely known across campus, and not fall on the shoulders of individual faculty, staff, or students if and when incidents occur.

Again, our goal in these recommendations is to help make the transition back to campus as smooth as possible. We are also conducting a survey about remote instruction among faculty and instructors across the system. We look forward to reporting the findings to you in the coming months. This information will be useful down the road as the University considers various modes of educational delivery.

I will end by describing something else we have learned in our conversations with faculty about the remote teaching experience. It is about mental health. There has been great concern over the past year about student mental health, and rightly so. Most of our students are at a vulnerable point in development and the pandemic has been especially difficult for them. Professional help for students who are in severe distress is critical. But we also need to think about the many students who are distressed, yet do not feel a need for professional help or for any number of reasons don't seek it. How have they been coping during the pandemic?

They are doing what we all have done. Like us, they seek support and help from their community, mostly family and friends. Teachers have also provided support. Faculty have told us of the many ways that students have reached out to them for help during the crisis. Some students have requested more time or extra help on projects or exams. Such requests occur in all classes, but the rate and extent, and the anxiety that accompanies them, have been much greater this past year. Students have also been confiding in their instructors during office hours and over email about how difficult things are at school and at home. Some students have made direct appeals for help and instructors have found out

about professional resources on campus for them. Other instructors have reached out to professionals themselves to learn how to help their students. When faculty describe these experiences, their concern for students is clear and heartfelt. And because most of them are not professionally trained in this area, they worry they are not doing enough, or that they may have said or done the wrong thing.

Social support from community members has a valuable place in society. It can benefit those who reach out for help, but there is a cost for the helpers. In modest doses, it usually works out ok. But when needs are high and go on for a long time, as it has during the pandemic, it can be overwhelming.

When we return to campus, it will not be like any other fall, a time usually filled with excitement and anticipation. It will be very difficult, and everyone is already running on empty. So, in closing, I return to where I began. We want the transition back to campus to be successful. For us, careful planning that includes faculty, students and staff in an ongoing and meaningful way will make all the difference.

Chair Perez, this concludes my remarks.