

Remarks to the UC Board of Regents

May 18, 2022

Robert Horwitz, Chair of the Academic Senate

Thank you Chair Leib and good morning Regents. I will use my time this morning to report on what the Academic Senate has been doing. I'm happy to share several accomplishments from our work this year.

- The Academic Assembly is the Senate's policy-making body. In a near unanimous vote last month, the Assembly passed a Memorial to the Regents with respect to the climate crisis. A Memorial is that odd name for when the full Senate faculty votes to make a declaration to the Regents or petitions the Board to do something.

Memorials are relatively rare and saved for matters that the faculty deem of critical importance. The last Memorial asked the Regents to divest the stocks of fossil fuel companies from the UC financial portfolio. Yesterday in an aside at the meeting of the Investments committee, Chief Investment Officer Baccher acknowledged that faculty and students had been ahead of this issue and were right.

The Memorial just passed by the Academic Assembly petitions the Regents to make investments in UC's infrastructure that will reduce on-campus fossil fuel combustion by at least 60% of current levels by the year 2030 and 95% by 2035. Now, this is a big deal and not yet a done deal. The Memorial must go out for an all-Senate faculty vote to be ratified. We expect the results to be tallied by June 10th. I will report the results at the July Regents meeting.

Speaking of the climate crisis, the faculty were heartened to learn that the UC Retirement Savings Plan will strip fossil fuel stocks from that portfolio, as had been done previously for UCRP and Endowment funds. The Senate has been pushing for this for the last few years. We understand that the change is likely to be framed as being done out of financial prudence. But the Senate celebrates the change in ethical terms. We must all work assiduously on all fronts to address the climate emergency.

- A second accomplishment. Assembly Bill 928 charged the Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates, or ICAS, to create a singular general education transfer pathway from the Community Colleges to the CSU and the UC.

UC chairs ICAS this year. AB 928 presented us with a complex and difficult charge. Each of the three segments of higher education has distinctive pedagogical commitments as befits their particular missions under the California Master Plan for Higher Education. Notwithstanding, at its April meeting ICAS achieved consensus and voted unanimously to recommend a new IGETC – that’s the acronym for the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum.

Each segment held onto its key curricular requirements but each gave up others to forge a compromise. The next step is for the segments to send the recommendation to their respective senates for review. Once community college, CSU, and UC faculty approve of the changes, students interested in transferring to the two segments will have a single pathway to complete general education requirements while in community college.

Faculty in the three segments remain profoundly committed to the education of California students and to expanding access and equity to student constituencies who in the past may have been discouraged or were effectively excluded from our universities. This is who we are and what we do as university faculties. This is why ICAS was able to reach a set of compromises on an IGETC revision.

For the very same reasons, ICAS remains opposed to AB 928. While the revised IGETC framework may help ease the transfer process, we continue to view inadequate resources for effective student advising and the deficient ASSIST transfer website as far more salient to the difficulties that community college students experience when trying to transfer to CSU or UC. This isn’t just our view, it is that of community college advisers as well.

ICAS remains opposed to AB 928 for another reason. The law has a next phase, one concerned with something called the Associate Degrees for Transfer or ADTs. This is a complicated topic, yet the ADT policy discussion is to be guided *not* by faculty, but by an implementation committee consisting largely of administrators and organizations external to course design, teaching, and curriculum development.

On this, ICAS remains adamantly opposed. These issues are best decided by those with expertise and who are closest to students and their education: the faculty of the segments. We fear that the outcome of the implementation process may attend to political and budgetary goals rather than the well-being and long-term educational interests of our students.

- And finally, a third accomplishment. Last year, some UC campus administrators challenged the efficacy – even the need – for systemwide Senate review of proposals for new master’s programs. They argued that the Senate’s review committees placed unnecessary roadblocks before innovative master’s program proposals. Many administrators claimed that Senate review grossly increased the time necessary to get these proposals approved and off the ground.

The Senate took these complaints seriously. We know how much work it takes to envision and plan these proposals. We also know that these complaints largely concerned money-making self-supporting master’s programs, where local campus conflicts of interest might thwart effective evaluation. In our considered opinion, systemwide Senate review – that is, beyond local campus review – ensures that self-supporting master’s programs are well-designed and in the best interest of students. Systemwide Senate review also reduces the reputational risks to the University from the kinds of ill-considered, poor-quality profit-making master’s programs that unfortunately beset many of our sister institutions, and which have been the subject of appropriate outrage in press reports.

In light of this stark difference of opinion, Provost Brown formed a Senate-Administration workgroup. Research revealed during workgroup deliberations that systemwide Senate review materially improved the quality of master’s program proposals – often quite significantly. Campus faculty sponsors themselves attested to the value of systemwide review in strengthening the quality of their program proposals. As for the time delay complaint, since 2018 the time required for Senate review has dropped by half from 6 months to 3 months.

I am pleased to report that when the workgroup completed its deliberations earlier this month, it re-validated the systemwide Senate review of master’s program proposals.

Nonetheless, the Senate continues to have concerns. This is because in the light of two decades of the state’s disinvestment in the UC, campuses understandably seek out programs and initiatives that look to garner revenue and financial advantage. Self-supporting master’s programs are one such initiative. They can be innovative educational endeavors. But, judging by the experience of some of our competitors with such programs, quality often takes a back seat to prospective financial returns. Many programs – indeed, a few of our own – fail to confer students with promised educational benefits even as they saddle them with high debt.

A result is misled and unhappy graduates, as well as serious reputational damage to the institution. And at a broader level, uncontrolled growth of self-supporting programs may unintentionally squeeze out state-supported programs. In our view, the continued systemwide Senate review of master's programs is a win for students. And for the University.

Another of these worrisome initiatives in the context of long-term financial difficulties may be fully online undergraduate degree programs. Some claim that fully online undergraduate degrees might address the problem of access to the University. Others counter that such programs are likelier to constitute a grievous departure from a quality UC education while not really addressing the access problem at all. The Senate is looking intently into this issue. I hope to report on our deliberations at the July Regents meeting.

Thank you, Chair Leib. This concludes my remarks.