

NOVEMBER 2021

Remarks to the UC Board of Regents
Robert Horwitz, Chair of the Academic Senate

Thank you, Chair Estolano, and good morning Regents. What a delight to be here in person! And ecstatic that there is a tentative contract with our Unit-18 lecturer colleagues.

When I addressed you in September, I spoke on the theme of the excellence of the UC and the increasingly fragile institutional underpinnings of the University's continued excellence. That fragility is largely the function of two decades of underinvestment by the state.

At the most basic level, while core funds have increased 9 percent since the year 2000, the number of enrolled students has risen 71 percent, translating to a 36 percent decrease in funding per student. This underinvestment shows up in many areas, a few of which I mentioned last time, such as the finding that 40 percent of students report not knowing a professor well enough to ask for a letter of recommendation. That's surely a function of a worsening student-faculty ratio.

Remarks by the Academic Senate chair can degenerate into a tedious list of problems and complaints. That is not my purpose today. Instead, I will talk about what the Academic Senate has been doing in a few important areas.

1. Campuses are open for instruction and research, and large majorities of students and faculty are thrilled at being back in person. Of course, the pandemic is not over. Just think of the things we had to do this morning to join this meeting. The situation has its parallels on the campuses. There are difficulties in organizing courses, lecturing and conducting discussions while masked, accommodating student requests for exceptions. Faculty continue to be highly sensitive to the needs and the stresses of students, but this is wearing on the faculty, as well.

When Covid hit in the spring of 2020, the faculty pivoted on a dime from in-person to remote instruction. The vast majority of faculty had no prior experience with remote instruction — nor were their courses prepared with remote modality in mind. But their willingness to get the job done paid off. Throughout the pandemic, student enrollment has been steady, and students have been able to take their courses and advance in their programs of study.

Of course, that effort has costs. For many faculty, research suffered because of the excessive time required for teaching and because they could not access labs or performance spaces or field sites or archives. If we were just a teaching institution, the teaching burden, while huge, would not be so threatening to the university. But UC is also research institution, and its research is an engine for the state of California.

To address the effects of the pandemic on the faculty, President Drake created a Senate-Administration work group on Mitigating the Effects of Covid on faculty careers. The workgroup completed its preliminary report. Provost Brown sent it out across the system a couple of weeks ago. Probably the most important item was the concept of Achievements Relative to Opportunity (ARO) in the merit, tenure and promotion process. ARO recognizes that for many faculty, the conditions of work under Covid constrained the research effort. Those faculty with caregiving responsibilities, including teaching obligations for school-age children, were particularly affected. These tend to be faculty who are

younger, female, and minority, early in their careers at UC. These are our seed corn – we cannot afford to lose them.

Achievements Relative to Opportunity would adjust the balance of research, teaching, and service in the merit and promotion review to reflect the individual challenges associated with the pandemic. The workgroup report also recommends ways for campuses to help restart research with bridge grants and teaching flexibility for faculty under particular stress.

One point of tension has appeared in the return to campus and the return to in-person instruction. Staff and students have articulated their desires for continued flexibility: staff for working remotely; students for being able to take courses in multiple modalities. What people must recognize is that flexibility for staff and students translates to additional burdens on faculty.

Teaching in multiple modalities, such as traditional in-person instruction, synchronous remote, asynchronous remote, and various hybrids of these, is time consuming. It requires a lot more coordination, often additional and different pedagogical preparations, and large amounts of email to respond to individual student accommodation requests. Time devoted to this is time that cannot be used for creating new scholarship, innovating and applying for patents, or training graduate students one-on-one in the lab or archive – all activities that Senate faculty are required to do.

Some of the accommodation requests from students are completely legitimate, entailing medically related concerns. At the same time, the burden on faculty is real and for many, untenable. In my view, we also need to remember the instruction modality that UC does best: in-person hands-on instruction, informed by research, in the labs and performance spaces, in lecture halls and seminars, at field sites. The more we weaken in-person teaching we risk jeopardizing the pedagogy we do best and degrade the overall university experience that makes the UC so life-changing for students.

2. On another topic, last year Senate leadership initiated an effort to help faculty alarmed about the climate crisis to organize on their campuses. The model is drawn from UC San Diego's standing Senate climate crisis committee. Other campus faculties are coordinating with their campus sustainability units. The point is to coordinate the many individuals and groups to help change policies and practices on campuses operations. The group is also discussing how we can address the climate crisis in our course offerings and requirements. The University has done good things in its climate neutrality efforts, but it is long past time to up our game.

3. The Senate has also begun its due diligence on the Regents Innovation Transfer and Entrepreneurship initiative. We have been asked to address the Report's recommendation that greater recognition and credit be given to faculty who engage in patent and start-up activity in the merit, tenure and promotion process. Vice-chair Cochran and I have asked the Senate's Committee on Academic Personnel to partner with the Committee on Research Policy to look into the matter and generate a set of recommendations, due early next year.

4. Finally, this year UC chairs ICAS, the Intersegmental Council of Academic Senates. At ICAS, academic senate chairs of the California Community Colleges, the CSU, and the UC work together to make transfer policies work. Aligning the three separate systems is no simple undertaking. There are 116 community colleges, many of which differ among themselves in terms of resources, practices, course offerings, and student advising capacity. The 23 CSU campuses and our 9 undergraduate campuses each have their own distinctive academic majors and general education requirements.

Assembly Bill 928, signed by the Governor, has charged ICAS with creating a singular transfer pathway from the community colleges to the CSU and UC through the Associates Degree for Transfer. Designed to make transfer easier, AB 928 poses real challenges to each segment. It will force the community colleges to constrain their students' ability to explore their intellectual interests. It will force CSU to make difficult decisions about some of its most cherished views of building better citizens through its general education requirements. And AB 928 will make it difficult for the UC to focus on our commitment to transfer student *success*, which we have accomplished by making sure transfer students arrive at UC prepared for upper-division work in their majors. It is for these reasons that ICAS wrote a letter opposing the legislation last June. Notwithstanding, the law is the law, and ICAS will be working hard this year to implement it.

This, Chair Estolano, concludes my remarks.