

Academic Senate Chair Kum-Kum Bhavnani
Remarks to the University of California Board of Regents
November 13, 2019

Thank you, Chair Pérez and Board Members.

Following my “maiden” remarks at the September meeting of the Regents, in which I offered my view on the role of a research university in our contemporary society, I turn my attention at this meeting to specific issues under our consideration, attention to which helps to ensure the world class excellence of the University of California.

The first issue is that of the Presidential Search. In line with Regents Policy 7101, I, as Chair of the Systemwide Academic Senate was invited by the Chair of the Special Committee to form an Academic Advisory Committee, the AAC. The Policy requires that the AAC have 13 members to include the Chair of the Academic Council, and at least one representative from each of the ten divisions, “to assist the Special Committee in screening candidates”. Academic Council also submitted to the Special Committee our amendments to the 2013 document, Criteria for the Selection of a President. Our suggestions include, amongst others, that the new President be an eminent scholar and visionary leader, have a deep commitment to, and knowledge of, Higher Education, graduate studies, research. We also suggest the new President be able to work closely with the State Legislature and Governor, and understand that commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion are key to furthering the excellence of the University of California. The University Committee on Affirmative Action, Diversity and Equity (UCAADE) asked Council to forward their letter that recommends all who are under consideration be asked to submit a statement on diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of the required materials, in line with what is current practice in many faculty searches at the UC. On 6th November, at “Stakeholders Day”, those members of the AAC who could, traveled to UCLA to meet with the Special Committee and offered, in addition to the above, Senate views focused on the next President of the UC. The presentations were followed by discussion with the Special Committee. Because a new President for the UC offers a provocative moment for the institution, I look forward to the AAC continuing our work with the Special Committee.

The second issue I choose to mention today is the reliance on Standardized Tests as part of the applications process for entry to the UC. As some will know, a Senate Task Force on Standardized Testing is in the process of examining the efficacy of the use of such tests as part of the admissions materials submitted by applicants to the UC. The Task Force was established in early 2019 by former Senate Chair, Robert May, and is co-chaired by Professor Henry Sanchez (UCSF), a previous Chair of the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) and Professor Eddie Comeaux, UCR, the current Chair of BOARS. The Task Force is comprised of experts in a range of academic areas, including psychometrics, education, neuroscience, statistics, anthropology and law. Since February 2019, Task Force members have been conducting their own analyses

regarding tests and testing practices, and they have also consulted with, amongst others, members of the College Board, those who advocate for the use of the Smarter Balanced Test as a replacement for current tests, practitioners who are overly familiar with the pros and cons of standardized tests, as well as others who have thought deeply about the reliance on standardized test scores for admission to the UC. And there are more consultations yet to happen during November. The Task Force has been meeting since February 2019, and will offer its preliminary recommendations to the Senate by the start of 2020, ten months since its first meeting.

The third, and final, issue I wish to mention today is that of our jobs, as faculty. As faculty, we are deeply concerned about the students we work with – whether graduate or undergraduate. We develop protocols and learning initiatives to ensure students can achieve their very best while at the UC. We encourage them to consider research possibilities: for undergraduates we create opportunities for them to engage in primary research, or offer other ways, such as internships, for them to learn more in areas about which they are passionate. With graduate students, we offer our thoughts on their ideas for research, always with the goal of supporting them to be the most creative and rigorous they can be. We are distressed when we hear about students in trouble – be it financial, emotional, physical, due to health issues and similar. We also, inevitably, ask students to speak frankly when they engage in discussions during our classes and seminars. We know the University is a space for them to speak their minds – and we want them to do so. We know that their being able to develop, or strengthen, their identities is an important part of their being at the UC. And that is why we do the work we do. We do it to support students, who, in turn, gain strength from knowing they are supported by us, and who seek us out for advice and guidance. Conducting research with students allows them to see our care for the world, how important we think it is to approach matters in different ways, and with different tools. And that is why teaching students and doing research with them is, in itself, a form of service. A service that allows us to encourage students to have confidence in themselves, so that they can be in the world, able to hold their heads up high and live their lives to the fullest. That is why we do the work we do.

That, Chair Pérez, concludes my remarks.