

Remarks to the UC Board of Regents
Robert Horwitz, Chair of the Academic Senate
September 2021

Thank you, Chair Estolano, and good morning everyone. I'm happy to be here in this new role. And I'd like to introduce Susan Cochran, the new vice-chair of the Academic Senate. Susan is an epidemiologist in the Fielding School of Public Health at UCLA and a professor in the Department of Statistics.

Like many of you, I wish this meeting was in person. Sick. Of. Zoom. I was able to walk around the Berkeley campus during the first couple of days of reopening and witnessed the energy and joy of the students being back on campus, masked and exuberantly in-person. Anecdotal reports of faculty were equally joyous – exclaiming how fantastic it was to be back in the classroom really teaching again, to be in the libraries and the research spaces interacting with colleagues. Let us hope that positivity spreads to the quarter campuses, which began just last week.

I'd like to begin my remarks by referencing the recent past. At the July meeting, Regents voted to support the proposal for a cohort-based tuition plan. I salute you. I recognize that this was a difficult decision for some of you, given the perception that any increase of tuition may jeopardize the goals of making the UC more accessible, more affordable, and more diverse. But the steeply progressive nature of the tuition plan, with its 45 percent return to financial aid, I think should go some distance in alleviating those worries. The tuition plan not only provides students and their families more certainty on the cost of attending UC, it hopefully will also send much-needed funds to the campuses.

The latter is no small matter. For, notwithstanding last year's unexpectedly good fortune with regard to the UC budget, in reality we are still digging out of the very deep financial hole left in the wake of the Great Recession.

I was cheered in the tuition discussion that the topic of excellence came to the fore. The question of the excellence of the UC, though mentioned alongside the goals of accessibility and affordability, sometimes gets short-shrift. Everyone touts the hugely positive impact of a UC education on the socio-economic mobility of the state's young people; the UC's contributions to the California economy; and the outsize contribution to the world from the research enterprise. Those achievements are premised on the excellence of the institution. And they can only continue if UC remains a university distinguished by excellence.

While we laud this year's increase of applications to the UC and admission of the most diverse class of undergraduates in the history of the university, and other markers of success, we need to be mindful how increasingly fragile the institutional underpinnings of those successes are.

I mentioned in the July Regents meeting that I have taught at UC San Diego for almost 40 years. You may recall I conveyed that it is harder to be a professor now than it was in the past. Some of the reasons for this are, no surprise, budget related. Fewer staff, whether on the campuses

or in the Academic Affairs division of the Office of the President, are now on the job who *directly* support the central academic missions. Since the Great Recession, the faculty and the remaining staff who have *direct* student-facing contact have had to pick up the slack, particularly in the teaching domain. The pandemic only exacerbated this dynamic.

Well prior to the pandemic, UC faculty salaries were not keeping up with those paid by our competitors. This, in the context of escalating California home prices, makes it especially hard for younger faculty – who are often more diverse faculty – to make a life with us here at the UC.

Staff shortages and fewer ladder-rank faculty relative to enrollment growth are hardly the only problems that jeopardize the mission and the excellence of the UC. Let me mention a couple of problems that faculty are currently experiencing.

The financial accounting software systems that are supposed to help faculty with grants and keep us current with compliance demands, do not work well. These systems make it difficult for researchers and support staff to access even simple data about their grants. Time and effort spent on work-arounds and temporary fixes are not just exasperating, they are time and effort taken away from research. I assure you this is not trivial.

Unfortunately, the problems that bedevil the financial accounting systems do not end there. Our retirees – both faculty and staff – have suffered from the flawed software system that handles retiree benefits.

On the teaching side, external “student tutoring” websites are built on a business model that appropriates an instructor’s intellectual property in their course syllabi, lectures, paper prompts, and exams. Those websites also facilitate the violation of academic integrity. That’s the polite term for cheating. The student tutoring websites not only undermine the integrity of paper assignments and exams in courses, I daresay they threaten to undermine the integrity of the UC degree.

And academic dishonesty does not just harm the university. To the extent that our graduates may be unprepared for the workforce they will enter, California industry is also shortchanged. Academic dishonesty only got worse during the pandemic’s conditions of remote instruction. This too is not a trivial matter, and I would advise those who see a bright future in remote instruction to consider the panoply of integrity problems very seriously.

Mary Gauvain, last year’s Chair of the Academic Senate, spoke in her Regents remarks how the special excellence of the UC rests in the intertwining of teaching and research. The problems that menace the research and the teaching enterprises and their effective braiding make it harder to be a faculty member at UC. They in turn pose a long-term threat to the excellence of the university if they result in faculty departures.

Many faculty, perhaps most, take great pride in being part of a *public* university that is committed to public goods and norms. Faculty separations have grown only modestly in recent years. But if it becomes too arduous for faculty to do their jobs, some significant number may abandon their own commitment and take positions elsewhere.

It takes money, support, and wisdom to maintain a great research university. So, I was doubly cheered to hear Board Chair Estolano call out the need to safeguard the excellence of the UC in her inaugural remarks earlier this month. The faculty also took note of Chair Estolano's touting of the importance of *graduate* education, so often neglected when leaders speak of the educational mission of the UC.

UC's graduate students are central to that interlacing of research and education that makes the UC a Research-1 university of such renown. And it is UC's graduate students – increasingly diverse – who will become the next generation of professors, doctors, nurses, engineers, and other professionals not only for California but for much of the country.

Regents and legislators often ask, sometimes with impatience, what the UC is doing to diversify its faculty. As an indispensable complement to faculty recruitment efforts, this is how: by supporting graduate education generally and programs such as the President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, which enable UC doctoral students – again, increasingly diverse – to thrive and go out to become the next generation of professors.

I have focused my remarks on the theme of safeguarding the excellence of the UC. As I have suggested, there are many challenges to be met. Be assured that the Academic Senate will be doing all it can to ensure the excellence of the university through the important business of shared governance. Chair Estolano, this concludes my remarks. Thank you.