Academic Senate Assembly Meeting, 12/10/08 in Oakland

The Assembly of the UC Academic Senate met in Oakland on 12/10/08. There were extensive discussions of several important topics, but no major votes were taken.

President Yudof spoke at length on a variety of topics, mostly related to budget issues and hence most likely obsolete by now given the seemingly relentless pace of negative financial announcements. Budget cuts, fee increases, and enrollment limits were all mentioned as possibilities. On the other hand, he also told us about his contribution to a proposal from the Carnegie Institute to invest federal economic stimulus funds on campus infrastructure. Of particular note to UCR was his response to questions about the differentiating between one or more “flagship campuses” and “the rest” as a possible means for cutting costs and/or preserving quality, where he stated that UC is the only real system in the country and he is not about to change it.

The UC Retirement Plan was a major discussion topic for the meeting. UCRP’s long term fund surplus has been eroded by the growth of its projected future costs and the recent financial crisis, so we have an urgent need to restart contributions to the Plan after a decades-long holiday. Unfortunately, restarting UCRP contributions is not as easy as it sounds because UCOP does not have the $250 million to cover the (much larger) employer share of the contributions. Employees on “soft money” would cover their own “employer contribution” through the benefits rate added to the salary costs. President Yudof said he does not want to double the deficit to fund UCRP and will ask the State government for the money. However, we heard later that these funds have been part of the UC budget request since 2007 but were cut by the Legislature. Fortunately, retirement medical benefits are not in the trouble because health care funding is “pay as you go” and retirees simply have the right to enroll at the same cost as current employees. Finally, it was noted that in a doomsday scenario only the UC Regents, not the State, would be legally responsible for providing the agree-upon retirement benefits for existing UC employees, although the State has always stepped up in the past. Clearly, this is a very serious issue with no easy solution. President Yudof wants to set up a task force to explore the long-term future of UCRP.

BOARS eligibility proposal, which was approved by the Assembly last summer, is now in an “educational phase” to explain the benefits to new President and Regents. The Chair of BOARS thinks that the changed criteria may go down as the biggest accomplishment of President Yudolf’s career, while the Chair of the Assembly described a new strategy for gaining the support of conservative politicians: if we reverse the roles of old and new admissions criteria, then would they support a new policy that drastically reduced the number of under-represented minorities and rural applicants, and reduced the number of eligible African American students from 14,000 to 4,000 because of missing SAT2 subject tests?

Faculty salary plan, year 1 update, showed progress towards bring salaries up to market value (lag was reduced from 9% to 7%) and to reduce number of off-scale people (went
from 77% to 55%). However, year 2 has been delayed until at least 2009/10. President Yudof now says faculty salary is his number 2 priority (down from number 1 because of UCRP). We had expected to fall an extra 4% behind our comparison institutions for each year we delay the catch-up, but their salaries have slowed down because of their own problems so things are not as bad as with thought. Discussion of the pros and cons of off-scale was lively (including people in favor from both high and low salary campuses.)

**Other announcements** included: a textbook audit to address the affordability of texts; distribution of the $20 million surplus from managing the national labs through a research grant competition; review of a new UC Davis Nursing school and a multi-campus global health school spearheaded by UCSF.