UC Assembly Meeting
February 10, 2021
Prepared by Peter Chung

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 am.

There was a roll call and minutes for December 9th, 2020 were approved by the Assembly.

Mary Gauvain, the Chair made a few announcements. (1) The systemwide Feasibility Study Working Group for the standard test for UC undergraduate admissions has concluded that it would not be feasible to draft UC’s own test by 2025, but it would be feasible to modify the existing standard test. The idea is consistent with the President’s suggestion and the Regents are expected to continue their discussion later this year. (2) Governor’s January budget proposal would make the UC be concerned in that the legislature sets the priorities for UC and may control the UC’s academic matters. (3) UC will be involved in rolling out the covid-19 vaccines whose supply lags demand, campus reopening will be contingent on various factors, UC has been pondering the best ideas for campus safety, and also wondering if vaccines should be mandated for faculty, staff, and students.

One decision item was opened, discussed, and endorsed. It is on the amendment to Senate Bylaw 336.F.8. A few representatives suggested that faculty should be held to the same standard of evidence as students and staff for sexual violence and sexual harassment, and the bylaw should be aligned with federal and state laws. For the equity, the revision is necessary and there was no objection but unanimous approval.

There was a comprehensive presentation by Shelley Halpain, Chair, University Committee on Faculty Welfare. The report addresses: (1) The implementation of the proposed curtailment plan which advises UCOP protect equally the retirement benefits of the employees who belong to the 2016 tier and selected the defined contribution plan. (2) Mitigating negative career impacts of the Covid-19 era on faculty. (3) Transparency in UC investments on fossil fuel companies, and (4) Systemwide discrimination in faculty benefits, retention efforts, inclusion and fairness. The assembly applauded the presentation. Please note that the same slides were presented to the UCR Senate Executive Council meeting on its Feb 22, 2021 by the local chair of the committee on faculty welfare.

Then President Drake came to provide the Assembly with general updates: (1) Covid-19 situation has improved as the number of hospitalization and deaths has significantly come down after a surge in fall/winter, and the number of infections has also come down. These are encouraging developments. (2) As for the vaccine rollout/distribution, he predicted that all UC employees over 50 years old would be vaccinated by the end of March. (3) He referred to ongoing struggle finding a balance between campus safety and social justice. He then entertained a Q&A session. Questions and answers were
geared toward the budget talk with the state, UC’s research on climate change and sustainability, the development of cheap covid-19 testing kits for students who may not have vaccinated by the time the campus reopens in Fall 2021.

Provost Michael Brown came and told the Assembly that $300 million from the UC’s base budget is now gone. And this loss significantly affects affordability, access, and excellence of the UC. Also, to close the equity gap, UC needs more funding. Also, the governor is very interested in increases in online learning opportunities. But, including that interest as a mandate in the budget discussion is problematic as it is inconsistent with academic freedom. The governor’s understanding that learning better aligns with ‘workforce need’ is also problematic because unlike Cal State or community colleges, UC is knowledge creator, not just a knowledge deliverer. So, it is alarming if the governor insists his interests as a mandate in the budget discussion. As for a few questions from Chair Gauvain and other representatives, Provost Brown suggests that local campus need to adopt its own measures of boosting up faculty morale. It would work more efficiently if such efforts are channeled through the local EVC, academic personnel and appropriate staff members at UCOP. He also concurred that Covid-19 has had significant impact on the academic career of faculty.

The meeting ended at 12:15 pm.