MEETING OF ASSEMBLY OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE

April 14, 2021
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Various issues addressed by Chair Gauvain and Vice Chair Horwitz

1) The economic impact of the University on the state’s economy and workforce was presented at the recent Regents meeting and the broader social impacts and public value of a UC degree was discussed.

2) A systemwide senate survey to faculty will be initiated about their experiences with remote teaching during the past year.

3) Concerns related Fall reopening: The need for meaningful faculty, staff, and student involvement at every stage of planning and decision-making. There is uneasiness among faculty about dual modes or hybrid instructions and the extra work needed to accomplish this mode of teaching. In addition, faculty are displeased that some campuses are subjecting research spaces to identical opening protocols as classrooms. Considering that there have been no COVID19 cases in those spaces, there is the need to open these spaces on a faster track. Moreover, faculty do not want to enforce masking and social distancing requirements, or dispense discipline. There is a need for clear campus and systemwide policies around safety requirements and disciplinary consequences.

4) The need for UC involvement to address academic integrity and the platforms such as Chegg, Course Hero and other paid websites used by students to cheat on on-line exams.

5) Zoom announced a new academic freedom policy that applies to higher education users and leaves content moderation to universities.

6) The recent data breach.

7) The Council is discussing UC Health’s desire to extend its affiliations with religiously-based healthcare providers who do not provide comprehensive care to women and LGBTQ patients.

Questions and Comments included: A) Vaccine mandate for faculty and staff; B) Whether faculty who teach remotely in the fall will be required to maintain a physical presence on campus; C) The need for better work distribution as faculty have taken on more work than they typically did; faculty’s transition to remote instruction has involved additional effort, including transcribing and correcting closed captioning for recorded lectures, work normally handled by staff; D) Remote teaching and learning do not provide a nurturing environment for students as learning does not only happen in classrooms, it also happens in hallways and in the campus community. Physical presence of faculty, staff, and students is vital for building and maintaining the University learning community; E) Concerns about staff working remotely and the need for staff supporting certain disciplines to be on campus and how this requirement will create inequity among the staff.
Chair Gauvain noted that the University is discussing issues of privacy concerning vaccination and that vaccination will likely be mandatory once full FDA approval are granted to the existing vaccines. She also indicated that campuses are discussing the concept of residency considering the shift to remote instruction. She expressed concerns that faculty research is not viewed as a critical contribution to the University and to the state but rather a hobby. She also indicated that Senate leadership have proposed an additional sabbatical credit for faculty to recognize their extra workload during the pandemic.

Reports of Standing Committees

1) Revision to Statewide Eligibility Index: Chair Comeaux noted that in January 2021, BOARS approved a new model and minimum thresholds for the Statewide Eligibility Index to conform with the UC Regents decision in May of 2020 to phase out standardized testing in admission decisions. BOARS decided on a model that uses HSGPA and the number of A-G courses completed in high school. The change to the index does not affect the eligibility of the top 9% of high school graduates in each high school based on GPA. Assembly action is required per Senate Regulation 466. Questions addressed the increase in UC applications and the decrease in the admission rates. BOARS has plans to study campus application, admission, and enrollment results in the coming years to understand how changes to standardized testing policy are affecting access and diversity. A motion to approve the new index was passed unanimously.

2) Susan Cochran, UC Los Angeles Professor of Epidemiology, and the Academic Council’s nominee for 2021-22 Assembly vice chair and 2022-23 chair, was elected unanimously as the incoming Assembly vice chair.

Meeting with President Drake and Provost and Executive Vice President Brown

President Drake addressed: 1) the data breach and assured that they are investigating the incident, implement additional security measures, and providing members of the UC community with the information they need to protect themselves; 2) He indicated that UC plans to reopen campuses in fall 2021 and will continue to involve the senate in discussion how this opening will shape. A draft guidelines is being developed that will require COVID and flu vaccines for all faculty, students, and staff, and address student arrival and reentry, COVID testing, masking, and social distancing; 3) On March 24, UCOP hosted the second of two symposia on campus safety, policing, and social justice issues. The input from the symposia will be used to develop best practices to share soon; 4) Budget: Governor Newsom’s May budget revision will restore last year’s $300 million cut to the University. UC is also revising its budget request to include funding to support deferred maintenance projects, repatriation of Native American artifacts and remains, tele-mental health, and faculty who want to convert courses to an online format. UC will receive $684 million from the recent federal COVID relief package, half of which must be used for emergency grants for students, and half for institutional purposes; 5) Lastly, the president asked the Senate to follow-up on a recommendation from the Feasibility Study Working Group to use a new assessment in undergraduate admissions to replace the SAT by 2025.
The president sees post pandemic life on campuses will be different and seems to be a proponent of working remotely.

Provost Brown 1) Informed the assembly that UC is lobbying for changes to federal immigration policy that will assist international students to obtain US entry visa; 2) He referred to increase of the UC application rate as a success of the new model for admissions; 3) Indicated the assembly of a workgroup to discuss the long term impacts of COVID19 on faculty advancement and morale; 4) He also mentioned that UC is applying for a $15 million Mellon Foundation grant to increase graduate student diversity.