Dear Fellow Members of the Academic Senate,

I write to update you on the fast-paced discussions and issues being considered in the wake of the current financial difficulties. Below I describe a number of new task forces working at the UC and UCI levels, deliver new information on several issues that have gathered attention in the past months, and introduce a new initiative which aims to more effectively gather UCI faculty opinions and positions.

New UC Task Forces

As you no doubt have heard by now, the UC Regents have established a Commission on the Future of UC, co-chaired by Regents Chair Gould and President Yudof. This commission has appointed 5 task forces with input from the Committee on Committees on each campus. Each task force has a set of questions and issues (see organizational chart and document listing issues) and is planning a visit to each of the campuses to gather feedback from faculty, staff and students. Representatives from each of the Gould Commission task forces will visit UCI on Monday, November 2, 2009, 2:00-5:00 p.m., UCI Student Center, Crystal Cove Auditorium. This meeting will spend one hour (or a little more) with faculty to receive feedback on whether or not the questions now proposed for the working groups are the “right” ones. This process considers adding questions not yet posed and eliminating existing questions from the charge. This meeting will provide an opportunity for UCI faculty to learn about the issues being discussed and to provide input on them. Whether or not you are able to attend this or the other meetings described below, you may send your ideas and suggestions to me at chair@uci.edu; please clearly indicate which issue you wish to comment on), and I will organize them and present them to the relevant parties.

Academic Council Chair Harry Powell and Vice Chair Daniel Simmons will visit UCI at a later date. Also, UC Interim Provost Pitts will also visit the campuses to meet with Senate leadership and “non-leader” faculty sometime in spring.

UC Reserves

Some critics of the UC response to the financial crisis have suggested that the university has untapped reserves that, if used, might have mitigated the need for layoffs and furloughs. The Office of the President has supplied detailed information on the composition and status of those reserves (see document here).

University of California Retirement Program (UCRP)
Last Spring we had a special UCI Assembly meeting where we invited all faculty to come to hear about the state of our retirement program. At the most recent UC Assembly meeting in Oakland we heard an updated presentation on the current plans and recommendations for the retirement system. Please find the contents of that Power Point presentation here (Click here). In addition, the Post Employment Benefits Task Force has begun its campus visits. The UCI meeting with the Post-Employment Benefits Task Force is scheduled for the afternoon of November 20, 2009. Please come to listen and discuss the state of our retirement system and the plans for its future.

**New UCI Task Forces**

The EVC/P’s office at UCI has also created a set of task forces and appointed members to deal with our financial shortfall (see organizational chart and membership). These groups are working towards solutions by suggesting cost-saving measures and/or revenue generating endeavors.

**Discussion of Furlough Mitigation**

The Academic Senate is concerned that the current implementation of furlough salary cuts may give rise to sizeable inequities between faculty across disciplines, particularly with regard to research. Some faculty whose research is supported by extramural sources are eligible for the Furlough Exchange Program, whereby they opt to receive extra salary in return for additional research effort, effectively compensating for salary lost in the furlough cuts. Faculty in disciplines where extramural funding options are limited normally lack this option, and must bear the full brunt of the cuts. Compounding the problem, some faculty without extramural funding routinely use their own personal funds to subsidize research and creative work, often paying for travel, conference fees, supplies and even research assistance out of their own pockets. In these cases, salary cuts will reduce available funds for such self-subsidy, presumably restricting their ability to carry out research and creative work. The Senate is investigating this issue to determine what actions it might take to mitigate potential adverse effects, especially for low-salaried faculty.

**Voice of the Community**

With the future of the UC system in general, and UCI in particular at stake during these difficult times, it is crucial that we both communicate with the faculty as well as adequately represent them. In order to do so, the UCI Cabinet has endorsed a plan that will enable us to more accurately hear your voices. This plan is multifold. First, it asks the Faculty Chairs, Executive Committees and Senate Assembly Representatives to discuss important issues with their faculty members and arrive at an assessment of the overall sentiment (and range of opinions) regarding certain important issues. These assessments will be delivered to the Cabinet for their information when deciding on these issues. This will allow the Cabinet to be informed about the range of sentiment on such issues across the various schools, and arrive at more informed decisions regarding them.
When we identify important issues on the horizon, we will distribute a set of directed questions to the Faculty Chairs, Executive Committees and Senate Assembly Representatives with a directive to discuss them with faculty in their schools and provide input. A second component of this effort is the enabling of the posting of comments on the Senate Website, where faculty members can submit their views in response to Senate communications through a mechanism similar to those available to readers of on-line newspapers and blogs.

As promised, I will be in contact often through these letters and in the meantime you can visit the Senate Website (click here) for updates and/or email me at (chair@uci.edu).

Sincerely,

Judith Stepan-Norris UCI Senate Chair