Dear Members of the UCI Academic Senate,

By now you are aware that the summer months have been a time of rapid decision-making and reaction in the UC system. This e-mail provides background information and updates on the issues involved. You have been called upon by various groups to make decisions regarding your views on these issues. The UCI Academic Senate is designed to represent its members and has formal responsibilities and input in running UCI and the UC system. I want to make sure that all of your voices are considered when the senate arrives at a position on these matters.

Below I provide a brief summary of the issues as I see them. In addition, I have provided links to the organizational charts of the UC [click here for document] and UCI [click here for document], a summary of shared governance at UC and UCI, and links to various advocacy positions on the issues at hand.

Brief Summary of the Issues

In early summer, the Academic Senate at UCI voted to endorse the inclusion of instructional days in furlough days [click here for UCI document], as did the system-wide Academic Council [click here for document]. Subsequently, President Yudof, after consulting with the Chancellors and EVC/Ps from the ten campuses, members of The Regents, and members of the legislature, decided and announced through Interim Provost Pitts that instructional days may not be taken on furlough days [click here for document]. Interim Provost Pitts followed this with an open letter to the faculty which describes his reasoning for his decision [click here for Pitts’ follow up letter]. UC Berkeley has proposed an alternative plan*, which changes the last few instructional days of the semester into “non-podium” days of review and reading (with the maintenance of faculty-student contact) [click here for document], and this proposal has been ruled to be within compliance of President Yudof’s and Interim Provost Pitts’ decision [click here for document].

It is clear that the President has the authority to make the decision to exclude instructional days from furlough days. To understand the distribution of powers between the UC Regents, the administration and the Senate, past UCI Senate Chair, Arnold Binder’s summary statement “The Question of Shared Governance” is useful [click here for document]. In particular, Standing Order of the Regents 100.4 (h) states “The President shall fix the calendar of the University, provided that no session of instruction shall be established or abolished except with the advice of the Academic Senate and the approval of the Board.”
As we all know, the UC budget crisis is rooted in the current California state crisis, and more generally in the context of declining state support for the UC over the last decade. This is a pattern that has already manifested itself in other state university systems, and one that the UC clearly must address. There are two contrasting views on how to proceed.

Several groups on UC campuses and a system-wide faculty initiative have called for a response to the UC administration’s decision on furloughs because it is directly at odds with the expressed will of the Academic Council. It argues that decisions have been made “in a manner that flouts the principle of shared governance.” This view focuses on the UC response to the state’s budget cut, and identifies the UC administration as making unfortunate and unnecessary cuts over the summer. For example, the system-wide faculty initiative laments the “program of tuition hikes, enrollment cuts, layoffs, furloughs, and increased class sizes that harms students and jeopardizes the livelihoods of the most vulnerable university employees,” but it is yet to articulate an alternative vision of how to balance the budget.

The other position, fostered by the administration and the leadership of the Academic Council views the crisis as a dilemma that the senate and the administration must work together to solve. Both are partners in running the system, and must devise solutions that protect the interests of the UC system as a whole while doing its best to protect the individual interests of its constituents. In fact, the UCI Budget Work Group and the Academic Planning Group (both of which have substantial senate representation) have been working on these issues all of last academic year and throughout the summer.

Something all of us can do to fight the larger threats to the future and quality of the UC system, is contact our state representatives as citizens to encourage them to restore UC funding. A useful website to help with this is http://capwiz.com/uc4ca/issues/alert/?alertid=13805076.

With regard to whether or not the administration’s decision to exclude instructional days from furlough days violates the spirit of shared governance, the first set of voices has argued that it does. These include the open letter by the group of 16 system-wide faculty members which is supported by several campus-based unions [click here for document], and one by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) [click here for document]. The letter by 16 faculty members is a petition that calls for a strike on the first day of classes (September 24th). As of this morning, 588 faculty system-wide and 72 from UCI (approximately 4 to 5% of full-time UCI instructional faculty)** have signed in support. Voices representing the other position argue that while disappointing, it is the President’s prerogative to decide this issue and given the views of other constituents, along with the considerable Senate input on many other issues, it doesn’t violate the spirit of shared governance. Prominent among these is the letter of support for the administration by former Academic Council Chair Croughan and others [click here for Croughan letter], and the Academic Council Chair Powell and Vice Chair Simmons’ letter in response to the AAUP letter [click here for Powell letter].
I will be in Oakland next week for an Academic Council meeting, and receiving your comments and suggestions will help to inform my contribution to this discussion. I hope you participate. Please e-mail your comments to the Academic Senate, senate@uci.edu.

Judith Stepan-Norris Academic Senate Chair

* UCB planned this change before the announcement of the furlough as a permanent pedagogical decision. It was not devised as an alternative to instructional days on furlough days.

** A handful of UCI signers are non-senate UCI faculty.

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

1. The University of California Academic Senate Organizational Chart
2. The Irvine Division Academic Senate Organizational Chart
3. Letter from Irvine Division Senate to Academic Council Chair: Furlough Plan Implementation (7/28/09)
5. Letter from Provost Pitts to Chancellors and Academic Council Chair Croughan: instructional days may not be taken on furlough days (8/21/09)
6. Follow-up Letter from Provost Pitts: Open Letter to Faculty (9/10/09)
7. UC Berkeley’s Announcement re Changes to the Fall 2009 Academic Calendar (8/20/09)
8. Letter from Provost Pitts to Divisional Chairs: Non-Podium Instructional Days (9/8/09)
10. Open Letter to UC Faculty: A Correction: From Shared Governance to Collective Action (8/31/09)
11. An Open Letter to UC Faculty from American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
12. Letter from Academic Council Chair Croughan and others to UC Colleagues in support of the Administration (8/31/09)
13. Letter to AAUP from Academic Council Chair Powell and Council Vice Chair Simmons regarding An Open Letter to UC Faculty from the AAUP (9/9/09)