

The Faculty Association at UCLA

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The UCLA Faculty Association Executive Board 2008–09

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An Open Letter to Richard C. Blum, Chair, and all Members of the UC Board of Regents

Dear Chair Blum and University of California Board of Regents:

The University of California is facing a budget emergency that is already having an immediate and seriously negative impact on the academic quality of the University. In the longer run, it will require that we restructure and redefine the University's role in the state of California. But our sense as faculty is that you are not fully cognizant of, nor acting in response to, the scale of the emergency that we face.

Your last meeting was on May 7, before the recent general election on the budget-related propositions. It included no serious discussion regarding the implications that the failure of the ballot measures would have for the state budget and how this would drastically affect funding for, and student access to, the University of California. Subsequently those ballot measures overwhelmingly failed. To make matters worse, recent reports from the state controller and other officials show that state revenues are falling short of even the most recent projections.

As Regents, you are both the trustees of the University and the fiduciaries of its retirement and other funds. You can help shape the University infrastructure so that it can become more efficient and less costly. You can interact with the Legislature so that the University can accomplish its agreed upon academic mission and fulfill its larger commitment to provide an educated and innovative workforce for the state of California. Please allow us to suggest what the situation looks like from a faculty perspective at the campus level.

The new fiscal and academic year begins on July 1, literally days away. Starting in August or September, depending on the program involved, new students will be enrolled and current students will be resuming their classes. They are coming or returning with expectations about classes offered and the time needed to fulfill degree requirements. Yet our campus administrators tell us that replacement faculty cannot be hired, fewer courses can be offered, classes will be larger, some programs must be discontinued or substantially curtailed, and that pay cuts and furloughs for faculty and staff will most likely be implemented.

Student fees have already been raised and that trend, we are told, is likely to continue. In the medium term and into the foreseeable future, student enrollments will be cut. Research units will be reduced in scope or eliminated.

At the campus level, various task forces of administrators and faculty are at work, trying to implement short-term adaptations to these

pressures. Open meetings have been held to discuss the emergency. Our top administrators candidly admit that the magnitude of the cutbacks in state funding were not anticipated until quite recently.

As one administrator put it, the meter starts running on July 1; every dollar spent unnecessarily after that date will make subsequent reductions all the more severe. They now believe that the cuts experienced will be largely permanent and that the state can no longer sustain UC at past levels. In addition, because of the drop in the stock market, the retirement program now has a substantial unfunded liability which, if left unattended, will cripple the University. Yet no UC employer contributions are being made to the retirement system. Each dollar not contributed means the retirement fund loses \$2 in contributions from non-state sources.

We are not asking you to micro-manage the University. But clearly major policy guidance is needed and you as Regents are designated as the ultimate makers of such policy. It is evident that the old Master Plan of 1960, which defined higher education in California and served the state so well for decades, is now an historical relic. The 2004 "compact" with the governor applied only in good economic times and is no longer relevant. Business as usual is no longer an option.

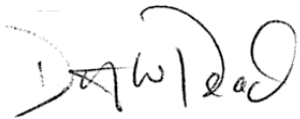
Should we move to a new model for the UC system? If so, then what model? How will you maintain student access to UC and a high level of quality education if the response to the budget crisis is to downsize the University? How do you plan to restore financial health to the UC retirement plan so that it doesn't become a liability to the financial well-being of the University?

In the face of the unprecedented crisis facing the University, we urge that emergency and open meetings of the Board be convened to explore the implications of the budget crisis for the future of the UC system. As policy makers, you must hammer out with the legislative leaders and the governor a new relationship between UC and the State of California. The Board must explore major short-term responses to the current budget crisis and develop the essential medium- and long-term strategies the University must adopt.

We do not want the proposals made by some legislators to change the constitutional position of the University that has served the state of California so well for a century and a half. Faculty members are strongly opposed to such a change. We need a new Master Plan of 2010, not stopgap responses to the budget cuts. We are not in normal times, and we need a fully engaged and active Board of Regents.

This is an emergency. We need your help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dwight Read". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dwight" and last name "Read" clearly distinguishable.

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