

LETTER ABOUT THE THREAT OF ELIMINATION OF THE UCLA LABOR INSTITUTE AND CENTER-JULY 2009

July 13, 2009

Dear UCLA colleague,

Many of you signed onto the "Professors' Letter" to Governor Schwarzenegger last fall, condemning the governor's line-item veto of UC labor programs as an attack on academic freedom, and I thank you for that. I'm now writing to ask for your help again. At this point, we're all facing cuts in salaries and operating budgets, and scrambling to figure out how to keep doing our work. As painful as salary cuts of up to 10%, operating budget cuts of 25%, and ORU cuts of 50% are, they are still not the same as cuts of 100%, and that is what the UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment and Labor Center are facing now.

You may have seen the July 11 New York Times article that said "The University of California, Los Angeles, will close its Labor Center". The article came as a shock, since UCLA's administration had not communicated a decision to close (or consulted about alternatives to closing) to me or Labor Center Director Kent Wong. To put it bluntly, we have no intention of closing. But there are other signals that UCLA is actively contemplating such a move.

It would be a huge loss to see the labor programs closed. They have been going since 1946, and are UCLA's only major program on workplace issues, and the face of UCLA to thousands of working people and dozens of unions and community organizations, as well as to academics across the country and around the world who study work and employment. Shutting down would mean ending the Labor & Workplace Studies minor with 70+ students, a grad student study group with 20+ students, colloquia and conferences, mini-grants supporting faculty and grad student work, outreach to community constituencies ranging from unions to corporate executives, and a unique space for collaborations across the UCLA campus. Closing the programs would also be a serious blow to academic freedom, since the precipitating event is the Governor's attempt to single out this one item from the UC budget for elimination...a dangerous precedent for programs of all kinds.

It is true that the Governor, driven by political motivations, is trying to withhold funding for UC labor programs from the university's budget for the second year in a row (though this is not in place yet and we are still working with the legislature to secure funds). But even if those funds get eliminated, the UCLA labor programs still have funds to operate: grants, carry-forwards from the 08-09 budget, and long-standing UCLA ORU funds that are independent of the state budget line. A move to close the programs would involve confiscating these funds as well.

We are not asking for special treatment for the labor programs; we expect to take budget cuts like everybody else. We are asking (1) that cuts to the labor programs be comparable to cuts in other programs, and (2) that UCLA and UC include advocacy for these state funds as part of their general advocacy for needed funds (they have been notably silent about the labor programs). And we are asking (3) that Chancellor Block meet with IRLE Director Chris Tilly and Labor Center Director Kent Wong to discuss options in this very difficult budget environment (he has so far refused to do so).

The closing of the UCLA labor programs is not a done deal. But it will become one soon unless a lot of us speak out. So I am asking you to make contact with UCLA administrators to communicate that you support points (1)-(3) above. It is *much* more effective to have a phone or face to face conversation, but emails to chancellor@conet.ucla.edu and swaugh@conet.ucla.edu will help as well. Please copy me at tilly@ucla.edu on any emails you send, and let me know what responses you get in conversations.

I would be happy to discuss this with you if you have questions, concerns, or suggestions. Drop me an email or give me a call at 603-478-1177 through July 18 (I'm out of cell phone range till then), or 617-997-6479 from July 19 on. Thanks very much for your support!

Sincerely,

Chris Tilly

Director, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment and Professor of Urban Planning

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