



OFFICE OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE

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Dear Colleagues,

I hope you had a restorative summer. As we begin the new academic year, I want to share a few thoughts about the year ahead and the priorities that will guide my work as Senate Chair.

Above all, I want the Senate this year to be defined by genuine communication. Shared governance works only when information moves in both directions: faculty need to know what is happening as discussions occur and decisions are made, and faculty perspectives need to reach the people making those decisions early enough to matter. My aim is for that dialogue to be consistent throughout the year rather than something that happens only after decisions have been made.

Budget and Transparency

The budget will inevitably be one of the defining issues of the year, both at UC Merced and across the University of California. Vice-Chair Beman and I are meeting regularly with the Provost's and Chancellor's offices to stay current on the budget reduction process and timeline, and I will share information with the faculty as that process unfolds.

Meaningful faculty participation in discussions about budget priorities requires transparency about the choices being considered, the tradeoffs involved, and how decisions are ultimately made. Advocating for that transparency, and for the protection of our academic mission within a difficult budget environment, will be a central focus of my work this year.

Making the Senate Work More Effectively

We should also take a careful look at how the Senate itself operates. Faculty time is limited, and participation in shared governance should use that time well. This year, I would like us to examine our priorities and processes and identify opportunities to reduce unnecessary work without diminishing meaningful faculty participation.

The goal is not less shared governance. It is shared governance that is focused, effective, and respectful of the many demands already placed on faculty. I will be asking committee chairs to help identify opportunities for simplification and greater efficiency, and I welcome suggestions from all of you regarding how we can improve our processes and make the Senate's work more effective.

Faculty Morale and Support

I also want to acknowledge something that can get lost in discussions about budgets, policies, and processes: morale matters. Budget pressure, increasing workloads, and continued uncertainty take a real toll. Senate leadership needs to pay attention not only to the policies being adopted but also to what those policies ask of the people responsible for carrying them out.

That means being realistic about faculty workload, being attentive to the cumulative effects of institutional decisions, and making sure that faculty concerns are heard when those decisions are being made. It also means recognizing the work of our Senate staff. Their institutional knowledge, judgment, and day-to-day support make shared governance possible, and they deserve our appreciation.

The Systemwide Context

Several developments beyond our campus will also shape the year ahead. The search for a new systemwide Provost under UC President Milliken will be important for the University and provides an opportunity for the Senate to advocate for leadership with a strong commitment to shared governance. Across the system, we are also confronting difficult questions about graduate education amid declining enrollment; new federal policies affecting international students and research funding; and lecturer contract negotiations.

Some of these issues will have direct consequences for UC Merced, while others will shape the broader environment in which we operate. I will keep you informed as they develop, and where appropriate, work to ensure that UC Merced faculty perspectives are represented in systemwide discussions.

Looking Ahead

There will undoubtedly be issues this year that we cannot anticipate now. What I can commit to is keeping the lines of communication open, being candid about what I know and what I do not know, and ensuring faculty perspectives are represented directly in my conversations with the Provost's office, the Chancellor's Cabinet, and our systemwide Senate colleagues.

Effective shared governance also depends on your engagement. Please [reach out](#) when you have questions or concerns, when you think faculty perspectives are missing from an important conversation, or when there is an issue you believe the Senate should be addressing. Your input helps the Senate identify emerging concerns, understand the issues that matter most to faculty, and ensure that our work remains responsive to the needs of the campus community.

I want the Senate to be a place where faculty feel comfortable asking difficult questions and offering ideas, where concerns can be raised and where faculty can see that raising them matters. Meaningful shared governance requires more than formal structures and committee processes; it depends on an ongoing exchange between faculty and Senate leadership. I hope you will see the Senate as a resource and a forum for engagement, and I encourage you to reach out throughout the year.

I look forward to working with you in the year ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Monroe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of the first name being a large, stylized capital 'C'.

Courtenay Monroe
Chair, Merced Division of the Academic Senate
Professor of Political Science