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SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

OFFICE OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE
EVAN HEIT, CHAIR
ehait@ucmerced.edu

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED
5200 NORTH LAKE ROAD
MERCED, CA 95343
(209) 228-7954; fax (209) 228-7955

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Dear Colleagues,

This will be my final letter to you as Senate chair. I am very grateful for this opportunity to serve over the past year. Personally, I have learned so much, and I have had the opportunity to work with many impressive, dedicated people, including my colleagues on Divisional Council and the Senate office staff. I hope that we have contributed to improving the campus in ways that meet your own priorities as we build this research university.

There were many highlights over the past year, but I will mention a few. One of them was gaining WASC accreditation, something that we all worked hard to achieve. Another was the successful Chancellor search. Although Dorothy Leland has been in office for less than two months, the Senate has already had several meetings with her. I am impressed with her level of engagement, her high (but realistic) aspirations for this campus, and the way she has drawn on her previous experience. The third is the UC system's remarkable support for Merced during this awful budgetary period. For example, the systemwide Academic Senate—your colleagues from other campuses—recently recommended that Merced remain entirely protected from the \$650 million in budget cuts now facing the UC system. This support is matched at the UC Office of the President. Finally, we have made organizational progress on campus. SSHA now has Bylaw 55 units. The Senate has completed its review of the Bylaw 55 units for Natural Sciences and passed a positive recommendation on to the Administration.

I am pleased to tell you that Susan Amussen will be the new Senate chair, beginning August 25. Susan has been a success at everything she has taken on for the Senate, which has already been a great deal. As a former Undergraduate Council chair myself, I am allowed to say that Susan is the best UGC chair we have ever had! Never having served on UGC or in the UC Senate before, she stepped in as chair and served for two consecutive terms. Susan has a good understanding of shared governance, and I know she will be a strong advocate in the upcoming year.

The Senate will face challenges in the upcoming year. One is the continuing issue of academic personnel processes, which need to be efficient, academically grounded, and based on clear written policies. Although the Senate has emphasized this issue over the past year, I am unsatisfied with the response so far by the Administration.

Another, broader challenge is faculty retention. As you may know, we lost seven faculty over the past year (five in SSHA and two in Engineering). Although the numbers are not high in

absolute terms, they are much higher than in previous years. These are people who we know and have invested in, and who will be missed. I think that the most important challenge that the Senate and Administration—jointly—will face in the upcoming year is to turn this trend around. Of course, there are always individual, personal issues. And there is the important matter of compensation. But from talking with many colleagues, I have assembled a list of things we can do to promote faculty retention, and indeed faculty welfare, that will require little or no resources. I hope that in the upcoming year, the Senate and Administration will pursue the items on this list, and improve on this list with even more items.

1. Clarify the tenure review timetable for assistant professors. I found that some assistant professors do not know exactly when they will come up for tenure review. The issue is largely due to unclear local policies in general. There are also more specific questions tied to taking career breaks (e.g., parental leave) or for contracts that started in January rather than July.
2. Establish a mentoring policy for assistant professors in each school. When the Senate surveyed schools a few months ago, we found that only Natural Sciences had a working policy in place to provide support for assistant professors such as a (usually) off-campus mentor. With permanent deans in place in all three schools, it is time for faculty and administrators to take this step across campus. My own impression is that the Natural Sciences policy could be easily adapted for this purpose.
3. Improve links between UC Merced and local schools in the community. Many faculty parents are concerned about local schools, but they do not always feel empowered to make improvements. We have a tremendous resource, namely highly motivated parents with educational expertise. As the UC Merced Administration builds links with local school districts, I hope it will work together with faculty parents to amplify their own concerns and proposals for individual schools. Indeed, there is a great opportunity to work alongside UC Merced students who would like to volunteer in local schools.
4. Reinforce shared governance, at the campus and school level. Consultation should be broad and inclusive, frequent and effective. As Albert Hirschman explained in his book, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, when individuals are considering leaving an organization, they face a choice. They can take the exit option, and seek something better elsewhere. Or they can take the voice option, and try to improve things from within. I believe that it is crucial for retention to reinforce and invigorate the voice option, so that all faculty feel they have a voice, across the campus and within the three schools, in making improvements to UC Merced.

To conclude, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to serve the Senate over the past several years. I am sure that many of you feel the same way as me about UC Merced—it is like reading a fast-paced, page-turning novel. I can't wait to see what will happen in the next chapter.

Sincerely,



Evan Heit, Chair