APPROVED

BERKELEY DIVISION OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE
Committee on Faculty Welfare
2025-26 ANNUAL REPORT

In fulfilling its charge as established in the bylaws of the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate, the Committee on Faculty Welfare (FWEL) carried out the following activities during the 2025-26 academic year. The committee was co-chaired by Professor J. Keith Gilless (Emeriti Faculty) and Professor Moriel Vandsburger (Department of Bioengineering).

WRITTEN COMMENTS

FWEL submitted written comments on the following issues:

- *Proposed Revisions to APM - 015/016, Disciplinary Sanction Guidelines for Misconduct Related to Expressive Activity, and Guidelines re Good Cause Extension Factors: Comments submitted to DIVCO on October 6, 2025.*
- *Proposed Revisions to APM - 036 (General University Policy Regarding Academic Appointees/Employment): Comments submitted to DIVCO on November 24, 2025.*

Some of FWEL's responses were brief summaries that did not find many issues to flag, while other draft policies demanded much more extensive research and responses from FWEL.

OVERVIEW

FWEL is charged with advising University administration on matters affecting faculty welfare, reviewing and commenting on a broad remit of campus and system-wide policies. Among campus administrative units, FWEL interacts frequently with the Vice Provost for the Faculty (VPF) Office, including Associate Vice Provost Julianna Deardorff, who was invited to committee meetings throughout the year.

During the 2025-26 academic year, FWEL engaged in comprehensive policy reviews, tracking systemic issues within the VPF's office regarding chronic backlogs in academic personnel cases (such as promotions and step increases). The committee's focus remained heavily dedicated to safeguarding academic freedom and faculty rights against policy changes, navigating escalating benefit costs, and addressing localized structural burdens placed on individual faculty due to student accommodations and labor dynamics.

CONSULTATION ON FACULTY WELFARE POLICY

Healthcare, Benefits, and Pension Security

The Committee on Faculty Welfare actively engaged with updates from the System-wide University Committee on Faculty Welfare (UCFW) and the UC Health Care Task Force (HCTF) throughout the academic year. A primary concern centered on healthcare plan rate increases driven by "risk migration" from HMOs like Kaiser to PPOs like Blue & Gold/UC Care as older and sicker populations utilized PPOs. Faculty expressed severe frustration over a 30% increase in

Kaiser rates, a general lack of transparency in rate-setting, and an inadequate 30-day timeline for dependent verification during the summer. Furthermore, Delta Dental coverage was universally deemed inadequate due to low dentist acceptance and lengthy reimbursement processes, prompting ongoing system-wide efforts to seek alternative providers ahead of an upcoming rebidding process.

Regarding retirement and campus security, the system-wide Academic Senate actively pressured Fidelity and the Retirement Administration Service Center (RASC) to bolster security measures following phishing incidents that successfully diverted pension funds. Financial tensions also persisted between the Senate and the UC Chief Financial Officer regarding pension funding levels, alongside political pressure from the Regents to increase contribution rates. To offload low-interest mortgages tied up in the Short-Term Investment Pool, UCOP proposed a new seven-year Adjustable Rate Mortgage (ARM) originating below commercial market rates.

Academic Freedom and University Settlements

FWEL tracked critical academic freedom issues over the course of the year. Controversy arose regarding UCOP's decision to release faculty, staff, and student names and emails to the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights in response to Title VI complaints, drawing strong objections from Berkeley. Additionally, draft revisions to APM 015 and 016 initially sparked alarm due to language stating faculty are entitled to First Amendment protection only if express interests outweigh public service mission risks; this clause was flagged as a major threat to academic freedom and dropped following extensive faculty pushback.

At the local level, the committee addressed a legal settlement between Chief Campus Counsel David Robinson and the independent Brandeis Center. The settlement concluded a Title VI dispute with a $1 million fine for legal fees to avoid a broad discovery process of internal administrative emails. However, it controversially mandated that the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Jewish Life review campus course curriculum. FWEL members on that advisory body clarified they were never consulted, did not approve the mandate, and would refuse to review external syllabi. In response, DIVCO initiated a policy statement declaring that no external actors hold oversight over course materials.

Labor Negotiations, Reorganization, and Administrative Burden

The committee routinely evaluated the impacts of challenging labor negotiations with the United Auto Workers (UAW) union representing Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs), Researchers (GSRs), Readers, and Tutors. Financial projections indicated that union demands—including the elimination of lower salary steps—could bring the total annual cost of a single GSR to roughly $100,000–$120,000, creating an immense financial burden on individual faculty and incentivizing departments to hire postdocs over PhD students. In anticipation of work stoppages, the committee reviewed operational continuity and faculty mitigation strategies, including grading leniency and utilization of AI grading tools like Gradescope. Faculty also strongly defended "academic sovereignty," insisting that student academic progress and dissertation criteria remain under faculty control rather than becoming bargainable union issues.

On administrative fronts, FWEL critiqued the proliferation of mandatory compliance trainings and the administrative "red tape" impacting research and facility infrastructure. Discussions regarding the administration's 20-year vision for academic program restructuring and budget reductions ("The Nimble Plan") focused heavily on department consolidations, such as clustering administrative support for smaller language departments to maximize efficiency.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

FWEL pursued and monitored several core initiatives throughout the year:

- **Course Evaluation Reform:** Proposed a study to DIVCO to strip numerical student scores from the merit and promotion process. The committee noted that numerical evaluations create negative teaching incentives, are heavily biased, and expose faculty (particularly teaching-track and American Cultures instructors) to abusive, racist, and sexist comments. The initiative seeks to replace numerical metrics with a peer-reviewed teaching dossier assessing course materials and curricular relevance.
- **Disabled Students Program (DSP) Accommodations:** Addressed the growing burden of DSP accommodations on individual faculty. While the DSP agreed to proctor all "time-and-a-half" exams, the committee pushed plans to fund designated staff liaisons to lift logistical burdens off instructors. Concerns were also raised regarding federal mandates requiring all bCourses materials to be ADA-compliant and the potential perverse incentives created by priority enrollment.
- **Office for Faculty Equity & Welfare (OFEW) Review:** Met with the OFEW Review Committee to share widespread concerns over the opaqueness of OFEW's authority during faculty searches. FWEL members reemphasized that faculty composition is an exclusive Senate prerogative, noting instances where departments felt pressured to alter candidate shortlists under threat of search cancellation. The committee highlighted a disconnect between OFEW's compliance-heavy role and the actual generational wealth gap facing junior faculty, who are severely stressed by campus childcare costs ($2,500/month) and local housing prices ($2–$3 million).
- **Indirect Cost Oversight & Grant Administration:** Highlighted a critical lack of transparency regarding the University's budget, noting that out of a $1.6 billion budget, only $400 million is clearly allocated to faculty salaries. The committee proposed an indirect cost (IDC) study and faculty oversight of IDC distributions to track where grant overhead funds are spent.
- **Parking and Transportation:** Received updates via representative Professor Emerita Martha Olney regarding the Chancellor's Oversight Committee on Parking & Transportation. Main points of frustration included inadequate and infrequent bus services to the Richmond Field Station, a lack of infrastructure for electric bikes, and safety/congestion issues surrounding the new Bancroft parking structure.
- **Campus Recreation and Wellbeing:** Tracked a student referendum to expand the RSF to address Berkeley's deficit in fitness square footage compared to other UC campuses. Faculty expressed frustration over operational issues prioritizing intercollegiate athletics over general recreation and recommended adding lactation/daycare rooms in new facilities to support campus parents.

FWEL REPRESENTATIVES ON OTHER COMMITTEES

FWEL members served as Senate representatives to the following campus and systemwide committees:

- Systemwide University Committee on Faculty Welfare (UCFW): J. Keith Gilless
- UC Health Care Task Force (HCTF): J. Keith Gilless
- UC Retirement Center Advisory Board (UCBRC) & Emeriti Academy: J. Keith Gilless
- Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Work and Family (CACWF): Sanjam Garg
- Chancellor's Advisory Committee on the Status of Womxn (CACSW): Alice Agogino
- Chancellor's Oversight Committee on Parking & Transportation: Martha Olney
- Recreation & Wellbeing Board of Governors: Ann Keller

GUESTS

FWEL invited and heard presentations from the following guests at meetings in 2025-26:

- Renee Chow, Dean of the College of Environmental Design (OFEW Review Committee)
- Michelle Young, Dean of the School of Education (OFEW Review Committee)
- Mary Ann Smart, Professor, Department of Music (OFEW Review Committee)
- Matthew Francis, Professor, Department of Chemistry (OFEW Review Committee)
- Sumali Tuchrello, EVCP Project Policy Analyst (OFEW Review Committee)

MEMBERS OF THE 2025-26 COMMITTEE ON FACULTY WELFARE

- J. Keith Gilless, Environmental Science, Policy, and Management (Emeriti) (Co-Chair)
- Moriel Vandsburger, Bioengineering (Co-Chair)
- Alice Agogino, Mechanical Engineering (Emerita) (Fall only)
- Tracy Becker, Civil and Environmental Engineering
- Jacob Gaboury, Film & Media
- Sanjam Garg, Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences
- Steven Glaser, Civil and Environmental Engineering (Emeriti)
- Terry Hendershott, Business (Fall only)
- Kate Heslop, Scandinavian
- Ann Keller, Public Health
- Lief Nelson, Business
- Martha Olney, Economics (Emerita)
- Haichen Wang, South & Southeast Asian Studies
- William White, Anthropology (Spring only)
- Brian Wright, Agricultural and Resource Economics (Emeriti)

In addition, Division Chair Mark Stacey served as an ex-officio non-voting member, and Academic Senate Analyst Patrick G. Allen staffed the committee.