

November 10, 2020

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is mid-semester and while our lives are still disrupted in so many ways, there are brief moments of what feels like the normal routine: advising a student on their thesis as the deadline approaches, writing letters of recommendation, grading exams, planning for Spring teaching, attending seminars. We are so inspired by your resilience and determination, and look forward to when we can be in person again.

Division meeting

Like the Spring Division Meeting, the Fall Division meeting on October 29 was on Zoom and had high attendance. Our faculty seem to appreciate participating by Zoom more than in person, although interest may also be higher during this moment of crisis. We will explore maintaining a Zoom option for the Division meetings, even when we can return to holding them in-person. The meeting included remarks from Chancellor Carol Christ, the ASUC Vice President of Academic Affairs Nicole Anyanwu, EVCP Paul Alivisatos, Vice Chancellor of Finance Rosemarie Rae, and the Director of University Health Services Guy Nicolette. All spoke to the extraordinary challenges we face and of supporting each other as we find a way through them.

The Chancellor's remarks described the range of approaches she is using and considering to manage our severe budget challenge, including convening a joint Senate/Administration task force to propose near and long term options. The task force will be co-chaired by Senate Chair Johnson-Hanks and VCF Rosemarie Rae. She ended her remarks by reminding us that even as we focus on the moment we are in, we must take the time to plan for a post-COVID-19 future where Berkeley is stronger than ever.

Vice Chancellor of Finance and Chief Financial Officer Rosemarie Rae also spoke to the budget crisis that Berkeley is currently facing. She explained the campus will have to absorb midyear cuts from UCOP, and emphasized that she is searching for ways to manage that without implementing another across the board budget reduction. Updates on Berkeley's budget can be accessed [using this link](#).

Nicole Anyanwu, the ASUC Vice President of Academic Affairs, encouraged campus and Senate leaders to support students and academic equity during a time that is distressing for many people. She also highlighted some of the many testimonials received from students that are having a particularly difficult time this semester and asking for wider use of the P/NP grading option.

Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Paul Alivisatos began his update on Spring 2021 instruction by bringing attention to the effects that this prolonged disruption of education has on the mental health of students. He also outlined the actions that were taken over summer to

prepare for a year of remote instruction, such as investment in “semester in the cloud” classes, instructor innovation fellowships, and the issuance of hotspots and laptops to students.

Division Chair Johnson-Hanks spoke about the uncertainty of the future that the entire campus is collectively experiencing, referring to this time as a “vital conjuncture.” Despite how dark and difficult things feel right now, Chair Johnson-Hanks explained that vital conjunctures always end, and Berkeley will be able to move forward on a path that aligns with our core values.

An update on COVID-19 testing was given by Assistant Vice Chancellor Guy Nicolette, who reported that University Health Services (UHS) has given over 40,000 tests so far and have seen very low positivity rates, and none of the substantive increases seen on many other campuses. He added that they have the capacity to collect 15,000 samples each week, and encouraged Senate members to sign up for COVID-19 testing using the eTang portal on the UHS website.

Divisional Council meetings

In the month since the last Fortnightly there have been two Divisional Council meetings and active work on Senate committees.

The faculties of the schools and colleges have authority to make changes that might reduce some of that stress that our students feel about their classes in these difficult times. Divisional council, informed by hard work and thoughtful discussions by COCI and UGC, made [recommendations](#) to the schools and colleges about grading options and related accommodations for students. We have heard back from many that these recommendations have been adopted.

Informed by CAPRA, FWEL, and DECC, DIVCO discussed and forwarded comments to the systemwide Senate and UCOP regarding the frustratingly vague **proposal from UCOP for a furlough program** masquerading as curtailment. While progressive and temporary salary cuts may be unavoidable, DIVCO opposes the implementation of the plan proposed by UCOP.

DIVCO often gets updates and introductions (if you want a clearer sense of who’s who and what’s what, run for DIVCO!). This month we heard an update on the **Long range Development Plan and Campus Master Plan** process, from Assistant Vice Chancellor & Campus Architect Wendy Hillis and Senior Planner Marissa Cheng. (See [LRDP/CMP](#)). And we also met Kellie Brennan, the new **Executive Director of Civil Rights and Whistleblower Compliance** who joined campus this past summer.

DIVCO commented on **proposed changes to two systemwide rules**, one expanding options related to on campus residency during senior year, the other supporting expanded access to courses on other campuses.

DIVCO discussed and forwarded comments on the academic program review of the Department of Film and Media, and supported name changes for two units.

Other highlights

The City of Berkeley Public health officer and the campus approved 5 small-scale pilots of outdoor in-person instruction. These are intended to start the process of returning to the teaching and learning that we love, in conjunction with parallel work to expand on-campus research. The road back is long, but we are travelling it together.

As ever, we are here to help and support you. Please always feel free to come to us with questions and concerns. We are in these hard times together, and we will get through them together.

Fiat Lux,

Ron Cohen
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Jennifer Johnson-Hanks
Chair of the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate
Professor of Demography and Sociology