



August 15, 2022

CAROL CHRIST
Chancellor

BENJAMIN HERMALIN
Executive Vice Chancellor & Provost

Dear Carol and Ben,

As I step down as Division Chair, I write with some reflections on Senate-Administration collaboration over the last two years.

In most areas, the Senate-Administration collaborations are strong and often our values are so in synch that working together has been easy. In discussion at Systemwide Academic Senate Council it is noted that the Senate and Administration at Berkeley collaborate and communicate more consistently and effectively than at our sister campuses. I am proud of that – but conversation with my counterparts makes it clear that working closely with the Senate is a choice you are making and that other Chancellors and Executive Vice Chancellors & Provosts (EVCs) are not. On behalf of all the UC Berkeley faculty, I want to express how grateful we are for this partnership. And for myself, how grateful I have been for the opportunity. It was especially gratifying to work with the incredibly talented recovery management group, to share in conversations at the Council of Deans, to support the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies' five-year funding plan, to support the creation of Computing, Data Science, and Society (CDSS), and to share in the thinking about possibilities for large growth in enrollment at locations off of the main campus. Our partnership honoring the Clark Kerr awardees in a manner appropriate to the prestige of the award was one of many highlights. There were many other accomplishments and honors on our campus this past year.

As you know well, I've had fabulous partners in Senate leadership and we have a fabulous staff. I want to thank them for their openness and willingness to work closely with me. First, Jenna Johnson-Hanks who so ably kept our core values front and center while we navigated a year of remote learning and from whom I learned so much about leading the Senate. And this year with Mary Ann Smart whose wise counsel on so many things and whose experiences in a different part of the campus than I inhabit shaped how I think about the need for multiple different approaches to solving what might initially appear to be the same problems. I know that in the coming year that Mary Ann will be an excellent advocate for faculty and representative of the diversity of faculty opinion.

Some specific items that I call to your attention (in no particular order).

Research

There are many other areas of notably effective collaboration on Senate committees. The Committees on Budget & Interdepartmental Relations (BIR), Graduate Council (GC), Undergraduate Council (UGC) and Academic Planning & Resource Allocation (CAPRA) have strong working relationships with their administrative counterparts. In the context of the successes, one opportunity where I hope we can do better is in our approach to research. The Committee on Research is still in transition from a committee charged with giving away small monetary awards to one that is more engaged in advocating for and supporting the full spectrum of research on our campus. The Vice Chancellor for Research (VCR) Office, especially under VCR Katherine Yelick and Associate Vice Chancellor for Research (AVCR) Linda Rugg's leadership, has been a willing partner. And the Chair of Committee on Research (COR), Lia Fernald, has been very thoughtful about developing a more focused agenda for the committee. Still, the topic of "research" is so vast and amorphous that a sustainable plan for effective partnership and shared strategic thinking has yet to emerge. The Senate would welcome your thoughts on how we might strengthen this aspect of our partnership.

Faculty overload

Faculty are exhausted and feel overwhelmed. Earlier this year, a relatively simple proposal for changing how we do travel reimbursement was floated. The proposal was imperfectly thought through and tested. However, the faculty reaction to it was much more vitriolic and outraged than the proposal justified. The letter you received from Chairs frustrated with the added workload related to the new Unit 18 contract is another example. Most worrisome, I think the faculty stress signaled by these and other examples leaves many of our colleagues short on empathy for students and increasingly disengaged with campus life. I believe we should be actively trying to intervene. Ben's proposal for "busting bureaucracy" should be part of a solution. Mary Ann's proposal to provide small financial incentives for faculty to prioritize their research over other activities should be another. I've been mulling over ways to acknowledge the overload more explicitly and to plant subtle suggestions that as a community we support lowering stress. One thought, would be to add a question to the (admittedly already too long) list we place in department reviews: *"Berkeley faculty are always pushing the envelope of what is possible for themselves. Are there things this department could do to encourage its members to lower their stress levels and balance ambition, achievement and faculty mental health better?"*

Capital Projects Committee and related committees

The Capital Projects Committee (CPC) is the last stop before projects are referred to the Chancellor and the Regents. The committee has made some changes in practice in response to CAPRA reports on the poor planning that led to the financing of the stadium and the project planning and development for Upper Hearst. Still, I don't think the committee staff and Vice Chancellor Marc Fisher have taken those lessons to heart adequately. Early this year, CPC was asked to approve the financing of projects with zero information provided. Granted, there is a separate capital projects finance committee, but it seemed to be the expectation that CPC would rubber stamp conclusions of that committee without discussion or even written notes that explained its thinking. I strongly objected to this practice this year and many of the members of the committee and staff present thought my objection odd. I took that to mean they don't really

believe that CPC has a decisive role, but rather approach their presentations to CPC as window dressing on a process that is essentially already completed.

One of CAPRA's other recommendations was that we review prices on comparable construction for every project. That was not the norm in CPC at the start of this year. It was by the end. I hope that is a reform of process that will stick.

Last, I will highlight CAPRA's recommendations that we pay much more attention to the value of land than we currently do. This was especially highlighted in the financial review of the Upper Hearst project, which CAPRA viewed as poor land use planning. I saw evidence this year that the bias to preserve central campus land for academic use is embedded in all thinking at CPC, but I didn't see anything resembling the financial analysis recommended by CAPRA for any project that came before CPC. I think these issues call for some careful review of our processes for shepherding capital projects – without adding delays that drive our management and constructions costs higher. I am well aware that Capital Projects is widely viewed as adding unreasonable management costs to even the simplest projects. Adding additional bureaucracy to our process is not the solution we need.

Disabled Students' Program (DSP)

I have written to you separately about DSP. As is typical of central campus offices, the previous director of DSP viewed it as her job to protect her staff from overwork. I couldn't agree more. However, her strategy involved transferring some of that work to the faculty and departments without any acknowledgement that the additional work takes time and budget away from other essential activities and might be unsustainable. She spoke with pride about how departments were hiring staff (without new budget) to support DSP students and was dismissive of the idea that departments were therefore not providing other essential services. Our current model for the University Development and Alumni Relations (UDAR) includes the recognition that leadership from the center is essential and that important work happens out in the schools and colleges. Similarly, Vice Chancellor of Equity and Inclusion (E&I) Dania Matos has only a small portion of the E&I staff on campus and must view part of her role as leading and advocating for people who are not her direct reports. The new DSP director should be hired with a similar vision for serving our students by partnering with and coordinating personnel located in multiple units. For this to be effective and not seem a transfer of responsibility, we must recognize that budgets for partners in the units do not emerge from thin air. We need to balance increased spending on central DSP with increased allocation for DSP work that is distributed around the campus. Then all of the DSP partners, with leadership from the new director, should explicitly value faculty time and be looking for constructive and creative ways to support faculty and their students. I have done my best to make this position clear to VCEI Matos and in a new committee that is thinking about DSP in this moment of transition. I hope you can express some form of support for this idea. I believe that your support will be crucial to it taking hold in an office that has a long history of behaving as if faculty are an obstacle to serving students and not a partner in serving them. I also believe change in this office could be a visible success in the busting bureaucracy effort. We can serve our students better and do so while treasuring one of the most precious and expensive resources on the campus – faculty time.

Climate Change

Increases in greenhouse gas emissions and the resulting changes in climate – most importantly changes in rainfall, and extreme weather are increasingly part of our consciousness and that of our students. Hardly a day goes by without a front-page story linked to climate. Our campus has tried several times in the last two decades to form a coordinated approach to raising our profile on the linked issues of energy and climate [e.g. Berkeley Institute for the Environment (BIE) and Berkeley Energy and Climate Institute (BECI)]. To date these have, at best, resulted tinkering at the margins. We are extraordinarily influential but nowhere near achieving what is possible. The enormous gift to a new Stanford College led by our former colleague, Arun Mujumdar, was gut wrenching. In another example, the Earth Institute at Columbia has outsized influence. Best I can tell, Columbia did so without creating any new departments or much in the way of new faculty.

This year many of our colleagues called for a standing Senate committee on climate. Some were motivated by the existence of a fossil fuel-based power plant on our campus, others by a feeling that we should be more visibly leading the intellectual and policy conversations that are essential to transforming the world's economy and protecting the most vulnerable. Existing Senate committees reviewed that proposal and didn't believe another Senate committee would meet the stated need. Likely CAPRA will form a standing subcommittee that is focused on campus electrification and retiring the natural gas plant. But the more ambitious goals call for another strategy.

The Senate is planning a working group to consider how the campus might be more effective. The group will be considering small changes, such as new committees or working groups, and large ones such as more focused decanal leadership. The Senate working group will be looking at models for institutional responses to climate and data science at other universities as examples of how we might proceed. If you have ideas for how you would like to partner in this conversation, please share them with MaryAnn. The next phase of this conversation is high on her agenda for the Fall.

Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability was more urgent for our Chief Financial Officer (CFO), who is watching depletion of the central ledger, than for those of us who were juggling enrollment lawsuits, COVID-19 planning, and other crises last year. Consequently, much of the discussion focused on central campus accounting and allocations. This is necessary, but not sufficient. I believe we need a much stronger framing of the process around supporting decision-makers in aligning their spending with priorities, reducing the effort that our department chairs spend chasing the last marginal dollar instead of strategic planning or supporting their faculty and students, and supporting governance models where spending outside of decanal units [e.g. Berkeley Regional Services (BRS) and Berkeley Information Technology (BIT)] is recognized as aligned with decanal priorities. We are working on a separate document outlining our broad thinking on this matter and hope to send that to you next week.

Two practical steps we might start with in the coming year. First, last year we asked the CFO's team for a budget analysis that was based on spending category instead of one based on fund source/type. The enrollment crisis derailed that effort, but this remains a top priority if we want to make progress on financial sustainability. And somehow in that analysis, the difference

between short-term annual budgeting and longer-term strategic choices should be highlighted. As Ben has pointed out, we've made a choice to preserve faculty salaries and excellence at the expense of increasing faculty number and deferred maintenance. That sort of tradeoff doesn't show itself in the annual budgeting conversation and was not considered to be a "choice" in the materials shared by the CFO's team. A budget analysis that doesn't surface those kinds of longer-term strategic tradeoffs is too narrowly focused. Second, the central ledger focus of last year's effort left faculty participants (and anecdotally deans) without an adequate understanding of connections to campus spending as they experience it – through choices made by chairs and deans. It also seems like the CFO office doesn't see the perspective of chairs and deans clearly enough. I wonder if you could ask the CFO's office to include in their discussion of campus budget challenges the spending/behavior/actions of a composite decanal unit. I imagine that the budget process includes a wealth of information that could be used to create that set of slides. I believe we would be stronger if the CFO and her team were seen as able to speak to the stresses of budgets where the spending occurs across the campus as well as to the budget in the center.

In closing, thank you again for your commitment to shared governance, and for the opportunity to advocate on behalf of our faculty this year. I am sending this note only to the two of you as I know you will view it in the spirit of constructive partnership I am intending. I am open to you sharing some or all of it more broadly if you think that wise.

Sincerely,



Ronald C. Cohen
Chair, Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate
Distinguished Professor, Departments of Chemistry and of Earth and Planetary Science

cc: Mary Ann Smart, Vice Chair, Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate
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