

The Peril of the UC Budget Crisis: Death of a Community

Educational lingo now includes the term “learning communities;” both learning and community are in grave danger in California. The UC Regents vote on July 16, 2009 to approve President Yudof’s emergency powers and furlough/salary reduction plan (Lt. Gov. Garamendi opposing) — in possible violation of UC bylaws and in a format of near suppression of public comment— makes a mockery of the core educational mission of the University, the charter principal of shared governance, and the conception of a University as a learning community rather than a meritocracy, economic engine, or market-driven or dependent corporation.

Yudof has spun the notion that protest is coming from only a “few loud voices” (Forum, KQED, July 17, 2009), but this characterization rings hollow given the vociferous and carefully articulated protests from UC’s Chancellors, UC members of the National Academies of Science and Engineering and Institute of Medicine, UC Faculty Associations, and countless others (signatories of many letters run in the thousands). To dismiss their concerns is to abrogate the social and moral contract of the University as a unique place of discussion and exchange.

Yudof exclaims that it “hurts a lot” (California Report, KQED, July 17) to see what is happening to UC. But the “shared pain” Yudof refers to repeatedly will not be shared fairly, as is indicated by analysis of the furlough/salary cuts by Jeffrey Bergamini (July 16, <http://utotherescue.blogspot.com/>). Yudof’s additional graduation of salary reductions beyond his initial proposal may sound progressive, but it fails to recognize that many low and middle-wage employees will be pushed toward a financial tipping point., not merely cutting their “discretionary funds.” Many are arguing that it doesn’t have to be this way.

Numbers aside, however, those of us who send our children to UC or who work at UC are being asked to comply with a profoundly warped and de-humanizing understanding of a university community. The community Yudof and the Regents appear to understand best is one that is conceptualized principally in terms of administration and development: managing, governing, fund-raising, building, and so forth. That is their job, one might say, but the differential between their specific culture

of policy-making and institution building at this time of crisis and what will now happen in the classroom, lab, department, and research center is widening to the point of deep, perhaps irreparable alienation. Yudof and Regent's Chair Gould fail to recognize that the language (of matching private sector salaries, restricted funds, and so forth) they speak is nearly un-translatable to the realities of teaching and learning, unless one is making an object lesson of UC's crisis. To lay blame solely upon the state legislature, even if there is a long history of the betrayal of education, is to over-simplify UC's complex fiscal organization and the acute bifurcation of privatized enterprise in the university and its lucrative revenue streams from the grossly under-supported core mission of teaching. To explain that all possible funds that might reduce or eliminate furloughs, staff cuts, library closures are restricted, as Yudof and Gould recently did (*SF Chronicle*, July 14), is to reveal an astounding lack of leadership in developing and managing funds that would enable UC to protect the welfare of its employees and its educational mission in a fiscal crisis or any other crisis.

Why have there been no programs announced alongside the furloughs to protect the financially most vulnerable employees? That Yudof and the Regents have not, to my knowledge, proposed no-interest loans from discretionary funds to assist those unable to make rent or mortgage payments, keep a child in daycare, or care for an ailing family member, etc.— is an appalling failure in human terms or at least a public-relationships blunder. Perhaps they are simply passing such creative thinking to the Chancellors, but if so this is a community whose highest level of leadership sees fit to hurt its own before demonstrating with the utmost clarity and deliberate discussion that all other options for meeting the deficit and softening its impact have been examined (including open scrutiny of UC's athletic programs, for instance).

In protesting the vote of Yudof and the Regents, I, like many members of the UC community, do *not* fight to protect exceptional compensation packages or soft-money perks and bonuses; the majority of faculty and staff do not receive such bounty. Many of us are struggling to make ends meet while maintaining our loyalty to our institutions and those we work and study with and teach. We are firstly residents of California fighting for education as *the* most important renewable resource we have. We fight for the availability of education for California's diverse population (diverse in race, ethnicity,

socio-economic level, religion, age, gender, and political viewpoint). We fight for excellence in teaching and the creation of new knowledge that can benefit us all. We challenge Yudof and the Regents to protect and empower the University community.

In 1949-1951, my grandfather, Carl Epling, Professor of Botany at UCLA and Vice Chairman of the UC Academic Senate, helped lead protest against the Special Test Oath (Loyalty Oath), in which faculty of UC campuses were ordered to deny membership in the Communist Party and any organization advocating overthrow of the government of the United States. The Loyalty Oath Controversy was a critical moment in UC's history in which faculty defended their rights under the First Amendment and challenged the pernicious intrusion of morally bankrupt state and national politics into the core educational mission of the University. We are not being asked to sign a Special Test Oath, but we may have entered an equally dark moment of the misguided exercise of power and its painful impact upon individual lives. We comply with the rationale and rhetoric of emergency powers and "shared pain" to our great peril as individuals, members of the university community, and residents of California.

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