

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH POLICY

Meeting Minutes
Monday, December 11, 2023**I. Chair's Announcements and Committee Discussion**

Chair Schumann reviewed the agenda and noted the consultants and guests who would be joining the meeting in person and via Zoom. UCORP members were asked to give their thoughts on the next steps for the APC Workgroup on the Future of UC Doctoral Programs. Chair Schumann is a member of the workgroup, which is one of two workgroups of the Provost's Academic Planning Council (APC) that were formed last year – the other one was charged to focus on the balance of faculty workload post-pandemic. In the wake of the new union contract for graduate student researchers and TAs, the Workgroup on the Future of UC Doctoral Programs was charged to tackle three primary topics: evaluating academic progress separately from paid work, the overall cost of graduate student education, and enrollment management in response to resource constraints. Trying to find a solution that works for ten campuses, let alone different fields, has been challenging, but although there will be different solutions for different disciplines, the idea is to find principles with which all can agree. The Interim Report of the workgroup was initially presented at the Congress on the Future of Graduate Student Education, held at UCLA on October 9th. The report was more widely released last week by the provost's office, with a deadline for feedback of Dec. 22. The workgroup will release a final report next spring, and in preparation for that, members are seeking input and bold ideas. The group will next be tackling issues such as incentives for faculty to mentor graduate students, which again will vary between disciplines. It might consider redesigning graduate programs. A big issue that has come up is that PhD students don't always go into academia, and in fact in some disciplines, becoming a professor is the alternate career path. The university has hired a consultant to conduct stakeholder interviews and assess UC's academic and labor relations structure, staffing, and practices.

The next set of negotiations with the graduate student unions will happen in 2025 and campuses are exploring potential issues and have formed working groups. It was noted that with the additional cost for GSRs, the university won't be able to support as many as in the past. One concern is the potential adverse impact to diversity when fewer graduate students can be accepted to programs. UCORP members also mentioned the vast differences among and between disciplines in terms of cultural norms and expectations. TA-ships are a big issue and function differently than GSRs. One example of funding differences can be found at UCSF, which has formed a joint program a Silicon Valley startup that will allow UCSF graduate students to work under the supervision of the company's scientists, which includes UCSF faculty members who retain unpaid faculty status.¹

UCORP members wondered if the recommendations in the interim report were at too high a level to be actionable, and whether it would be necessary to produce separate reports for every sub-discipline. Members asked if the final report could provide a menu of options that different programs can take, and agreed that at the very least graduate students should be provided with

¹ <https://www.science.org/content/article/controversial-plan-brings-ph-d-students-biotech-training>

complete and updated information about career prospects from their program to enable them to plan their academic career.

- *Update from Research Data Backup Steering Committee*

UCORP liaison Bin Liu reported that the RDBS (Research Data Backup System) steering committee issued an initial request for proposals that yielded about a dozen submissions. The committee will narrow it down and then release a second request with more details on budget and other specifications.

- *MRU Review process*

Committee members were asked to read the UCHRI (UC Humanities Research Institute) self-report and use a template to record their thoughts on the unit's strengths and weaknesses, and any questions for the director. The questions will be compiled and sent to the director in advance of the March meeting.

Action: Meeting minutes from November 6th were approved.

II. Consultation with the Office of the President – Office of Research and Innovation

- *Updates from the Vice President for Research & Innovation*

VP Theresa Maldonado introduced Coreen Harada, who will start full time in January as the Executive Director for Research and Innovation and Special Assistant to the Vice President. Harada joins UC from private industry in Washington, DC.

VP Maldonado is working with the California Governor's Office (GoBiz) on UC involvement in the federal CHIPS Act. Relevant work is happening at some of the UC campuses and a collaboration is developing that includes other California universities. The next steps will be a letter from Governor Newsom to the Secretary of Commerce and then RFPs from the national center. Other states – NY, TX, AZ – have already formalized agreements.

VP Maldonado also mentioned that she will be talking to VC-Rs and equivalents at the national labs about organizing AI expertise around the system. This would be in part to provide experts to the state to inform their work. The scope of AI is huge, and Maldonado said she would follow-up with UCORP.

- *Multicampus Research*

An EH&S Report for Off-campus Research Facilities and Field Sites (October 2023) was distributed to UCORP members in the agenda materials. Although the report focuses on safety issues, it relates to the larger issue of oversight for multi-campus research entities. Feedback would be appreciated.

- *Office of Research Policy Analysis and Coordination (RPAC)*

Executive Director Deborah Motton wanted to make sure that researchers were aware of new research security guidelines and requirements for those faculty with international affiliations (with countries of concern) who are working in emerging technology. Requirements include augmented review and approval for institutional awards – they do not apply to individual grants or to federally-

funded or state awards. Motton noted that these agreements and awards are in the name of the Regents, not just the researchers.

- *UC Research Initiatives*

- Dissemination/circulation of RGPO funding opportunities

UCORP members asked about dissemination of information about UC-wide funding opportunities. Executive Director Erwin said that grant opportunities managed by UC are disseminated via email to mailing lists, via systemwide committees, and through campus VC-R offices. Many campuses have a website to highlight funding opportunities that is part of the office of research or research development office. But communication is a constant issue in a system as dispersed as UC.

For some opportunities, UC has organized webinars or symposia to reach broader audiences. The state climate funding was the largest amount that has ever come directly from the state for research, and it came with certain strings attached – proposals needed to include community engagement and partnership aspects in order to be competitive. R&I expended much effort to educate researchers about the proposal requirements. UCORP members felt that information about the climate funding was widely known, but other opportunities are not advertised as well as they could be. Suggestions included:

- For emails, include “funding opportunity” in the subject line.
- Make a website that is organized by “new funding this month” or “this quarter” (this might be better hosted at the campuses – there are only a few UCRI opportunities each year)
- Ask at the next COVCR meeting if there is anything they can do at their campuses to promote UC research opportunities.

III. Consultation with UC Provost Katherine Newman

Provost Katherine Newman joined the meeting via Zoom to discuss graduate education, research priorities, and other relevant topics.

Provost Newman acknowledged the differences between and among fields and said that she is interested in finding overriding principles that apply to all. For example, thinking about the future and developing robust pathways to maximize opportunities for graduates. She is interested in forecasting employment patterns and looking at trends, and she has engaged Lightcast analytics for labor market analysis and to find out where graduates are actually working.

The size of graduate cohorts in some fields is dictated currently by teaching demands (and in some cases research funding), rather than future demand for graduates in that area or mentorship resources available in the program. Even if the circumstances are different in different fields, the principle should be that outcomes matter. In terms of determining the size of a graduate program, the provost noted that stronger packages for fewer graduate students may be better than weaker packages for more. In some fields it may be possible to find efficiencies in the length of time to degree. She is mindful of the UAW agreement and the impact of that on budgets and the future of graduate education more broadly.

In promoting the importance of the UC research enterprise, the provost said that every meeting of the Regent’s Academic and Student Affairs Committee will feature a deep dive into some aspect of research, including presentations on interdisciplinary research institutes, observatories, hydrogen hub funding, or AI. In Sacramento, policy advisors want to connect to experts in relevant areas such

as vaccines or K-12 education and need an easier way to connect to faculty doing work related to all types of legislative activity. The newly renovated UC Sacramento Center, which is close to the state legislature, will be used to foster connections. Examples include the California Policy Lab, a UC center that analyses data sets from the state. Provost Newman would like to see legislators receive a constant feed of the amazing things that faculty are doing, which can also lead back to the people doing that work. This is not just in the sciences, but also literature and philosophy.

Regarding online education, the provost believes that there will be broader sources of enrollment, including older, later career students who will be interested in online degrees. She said there are 75,000 people in California who started at UC and didn't finish, and that they are one of the targets for online degree opportunities.

Other topics briefly touched on with the provost were faculty mental health in dealing with responsibilities that have increased every year. Augmented teaching responsibilities, increased enrollment, and now the union agreement have all escalated faculty stress. The provost said that retirements outpaced hiring during the pandemic and suggested that more faculty hiring is coming. UCORP members asked about funding for graduate students and how graduate student tuition is spent. The provost did not know the answer (she suggested labs, physical plant, salaries), but volunteered to ask the budget administrators. The provost is open to suggestions for doing things differently and more efficiently. For example, would a more durable labor force serving as teaching assistants – like entry level lecturers or teaching professors – help reduce the burden on faculty? She is also interested in finding out whether faculty are swapping out grad students for post-docs moving forward.

IV. Consultation with the Office of the President – Academic Personnel and Programs

Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Programs Douglas Haynes joined the meeting via Zoom and Associate Vice Provost and Deputy to the Vice Provost Amy K. Lee joined in person for an update and discussion about the new landscape of managing student employees and other personnel/research-related topics. In August, the Academic Senate's Coordinate Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) sent out guidance on directed study courses – usually 299s or 599s – to try to address the often overlapping roles of graduate students as both students and employees. In September, APP, the Office of Labor Relations, and UC Legal jointly prepared a guidance document that was sent to campus academic leaders. More guidance from UCOP is being developed and will be disseminated systemwide. An upcoming systemwide meeting of Academic Personnel directors will include discussions about the new landscape of academic labor and create coherence and coordination across the system.

The graduate student contract ends in 2025 and planning for the next negotiations will start in January to ensure sufficient preparation. Faculty are very interested in being engaged before and during the negotiating process.

Vice Provost Haynes and AVP Lee have been providing regular updates to the Academic Council and will continue to do so. Academic Personnel directors will continue to provide guidance to help faculty navigate the new graduate student employment landscape.

V. Academic Senate Leadership Update

Academic Council Chair Jim Steintrager and Vice Chair Steven Cheung joined the meeting to provide an update on the current activities of the Senate.

President Drake announced initiatives related to the Middle East and campus climate that would focus on campus safety, mental health, and “viewpoint neutral educational programming” on the history of the area and on the first amendment and free speech. His use of the term “viewpoint neutral” got pushback from history professors, in particular, and he later clarified that it was not a curriculum mandate, but rather funding that would be available to campuses to develop learning materials. The response of the faculty was picked up by news outlets.

Political statements on departmental (or institutional UC) websites has returned as an issue. The Academic Senate released recommendations a couple of years ago² that emphasized the importance of identifying any statement as not being an official communication or stance of the university. Some Regents would like stronger restrictions or a ban on political statements on departmental websites and have convened a short-term special working group. Chair Steintrager will participate in the discussions. He noted that it is a national issue as well.

Although the state is projecting a budget shortfall, faculty can expect an on-scale salary increase of 4.2% in October. The UCRP employee contribution will hold steady, while the employer contribution will increase over the next few years from 14 to 18% to bring it up to fully funded. It was reported that UC retirement system investments over the past year have had high volatility and little return. In capital planning news, UC Merced will have a new medical building in anticipation of a full medical school in the future, and UCLA has new high-density student housing at Gayley towers.

Asked about the UC Humanities Research Institute, chair Steintrager noted that it does not have a defined research goal or timeline, as MRUs were originally intended to have. Current MRUs, however, are a diverse group.

Asked to reflect on the discussion with the provost, UCORP’s graduate student representative noted her remarks about trying to better connect policymakers and the public to UC research. Graduate students are in an excellent position to be a conduit and able to describe research, but they receive little training around how to communicate about their work and its value. Mentors in this area could be helpful to the university, PIs, and also in general career development. It would take additional resources, but a worthwhile investment.

Members briefly discussed the Oracle financial software rollout, noting that it was still causing problems at UC Merced and UCSD. Those campuses about to start the implementation are worried about the preparations and looming disaster. Chair Schumann will check in with the Academic Council and other Senate committees to find out what, if anything, can be done. Committee members will be asked to track and provide feedback.

Meeting adjourned: 3:30

Meeting minutes drafted by: Joanne Miller, UCORP committee analyst

[Attest: Cyndi Schumann, UCORP Chair]

²² <https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/reports/rh-senate-divs-recs-for-dept-statements.pdf>

Meeting participants:

Cynthia Schumann (Chair), Susanne Nicholas (Vice Chair), Larry Karp (Berkeley), Paul Hastings (Davis), James Weatherall (Irvine), Alapakkam (Sam) Sampath (Los Angeles), Tao Ye (Merced), Elina Zuniga (San Diego), Bin Liu (San Francisco), Alan Murray (Santa Barbara), Michael Hance (Santa Cruz), Hanna Butler-Struben (Graduate Student, UC Davis), James Steintrager (Academic Council Chair), Steven Cheung (Academic Council Vice Chair), Joanne Miller (Committee Analyst), Theresa Maldonado (Vice President for Research and Innovation), Kathleen Erwin, (Executive Director, Research Grants Program Office), Deborah Motton (Executive Director, Research Policy Analysis and Coordination), Katherine Newman (Provost and Executive VP), Douglas Haynes (Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Programs), Amy K. Lee (Associate Vice Provost and Deputy to the Vice Provost).