

October 25, 2020

TO: Jason Stajich, Chair
Academic Senate

FROM: Philip Brisk, Chair 
BCOE Executive Committee

RE: Systemwide Review of Proposed Curtailment Program

Dear Jason,

On October 15th, the BCOE Executive Committee reviewed the proposed campus curtailment program for the 2020-21 academic year. Despite structural deficits due to lower per-student funding from UCOP compared to peer UCs over the long term, UCR has achieved the same levels of academic excellence, and in addition, has achieved the distinction of being the number-one university in the nation for social mobility. UCR is facing long-term challenges that are unique to its position; curtailment may provide short-term help, but does not address UCR's current budgetary situation, and does not address the ultimate crisis on the horizon, which is that academic units are presently facing 10-15% cuts in their budgets that may decimate both the teaching and research mission of the University.

The general sentiment of the Committee was that the proposal was unnecessarily prescriptive: we are all aware that budget cuts are on the horizon, but it is unclear why it would not be preferable for each UC Campus to chart its own path, leveraging existing shared governance structures between the Administration and Senate Division. While extended curtailment is a worthwhile option to consider, and may be the correct choice for some, if not all UC campuses, the decision is best made locally in accordance with the mission and finances of each individual campus. Each campus should be afforded the opportunity to be strategic and to look at the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of specific programs, and to develop creative new revenue scenarios for the immediate and distant future. Rather than prescribing curtailment as mandate, a more palatable alternative would be to specify upper limits on what Chancellors can do.

- The Committee recognizes the need for budgetary adjustment in the fact of COVID-19, but it seems premature to start making structural adjustments:
- It is challenging to predict the anticipated duration of the pandemic and whether or not society will be able to eventually adjust.
 - Why is curtailment being proposed now as a short-term measure, as opposed to making a more substantive longer-term plan?
 - We want to make sure that we do not handicap ourselves long-term over a problem that many not fully materialize.
- How much money is projected to be saved through curtailment?
- Why is no substantive information about budgets provided?

Additionally, the Committee would like to advise that some aspects of a blanket curtailment may be counterproductive from a budgetary perspective. Several BCOE constituents pointed out that UCR temporarily froze construction in response to the 2008-2009 economic downturn; the net result was that UCR actually lost money due to the overhead of temporarily stopping and restarting construction projects after just a few weeks. No activity should be curtailed unless there is reason to believe that financial savings can be accrued.

Beyond that, many aspects of what is being proposed in the memo are exceptionally vague; as such, it is not possible to adequately evaluate and provide substantive feedback on the technical details of the proposal. The following comments, questions, and recommendations reflect an earnest attempt to understand the curtailment proposal, and highlight issues that the Committee, considered to be particularly relevant:

- It is not possible to evaluate the proposal without knowing the following:
 - What will be the cutoffs for salary tiers?
 - Who may and may not use accrued time?
 - Who will make the determination and how will it be made?
 - Will the determination process be top-down or will it involve shared governance?

- How are income levels determined?
 - This is particularly challenging when assessing faculty income, due to there being multiple salary scales as well as off-scale salary.
 - It is unclear whether or not this proposal would affect the rate that faculty are paid during the summer, e.g., through extramural research grants.
 - The Negotiated Salary Trial Program (NSTP) creates an additional set of challenges that have not been thought through. NSTP for 2020-2021 has already been negotiated, and legally cannot be changed for the year.
 - Would faculty receiving NSTP be exempt from curtailment?

- Curtailment is by definition temporary; a reduction in salary is by definition permanent. With respect to faculty salary, it is unclear if what is being proposed here would be implemented as a reduction in salary or as furloughs.
 - Furloughs are preferable, as they ensure that summer salary and negotiated salary are not affected.

- Will curtailment impact healthcare in any way?
 - This includes any of the UC-negotiated healthcare plans, not just UC Care.

- Researchers on soft money positions who are funded exclusively by extramural grants should not be curtailed!

While the BCOE Executive Committee represents the Faculty, the Committee recognizes that staff issues are critical to university operations. The Faculty has the following concerns:

- It is not possible to evaluate the proposal without knowing the following:
 - Who will determine which curtailment schedules do or do not adversely affect instruction or clinical operations?
 - Many staff perform functions that are critical outside of the dates that comprise the quarter, including during the Winter and Spring breaks.
 - What is the timeline to make the determination?
 - What is the time period in which curtailment is expected to be used?
 - By the end of the fiscal year?
 - Within 12 months?

- A minimum of five days of additional curtailment was proposed. What is the rationale for this specific number?

- Concentrating curtailment days to a specific month will create significant hardships for all employees (not just faculty) who do not have savings to draw upon.
 - Curtailment of 1 day per month over five months would be much easier to withstand compared to curtailment of 5 days within a single month.
 - This is especially true during the Holiday season, where family-related expenses typically increase.
 - As much advance notice as possible of any specific curtailment decision will help employees plan for reduced income.