

UC SANTA BARBARA

Academic Senate

Divisional Chair's Newsletter - January 2021

Welcome to this edition of the Divisional Chair's Newsletter, which is designed to keep Senate members informed about recent events in the Academic Senate.

Dear Colleagues,

A very happy new year to all! I am optimistic that we will see a gradual return to on-campus operations in 2021, although there is still much work to be done, and considerable uncertainty about the pace at which it will be safe to resume our normal lives. Throughout this process, the Senate will continue to represent the interests of its members and our entire campus community, and to keep you informed of any developments.

Budget updates. Governor Newsom's January 2021 budget request includes a partial restoration of last summer's cut of UC state funds in next year's budget. Federal stimulus funds recently approved by Congress are expected to bring additional student aid and relief funds for campus expenses related to COVID. These developments are not yet final, but they may alleviate some of the stress on the university's budget. Nevertheless, the budget outlook for the current fiscal year remains very challenging.

COVID-19 update. Free on-campus COVID-19 testing will continue to be available throughout winter quarter Monday-Friday for all asymptomatic campus community members. To book an appointment, visit the [Student Health Services Patient Portal](#). The results are generally available within 1-3 days. If you are sick, please do not come to the testing site; instead, you should request symptomatic testing from your healthcare provider (unwell students can go to Student Health for testing). If you receive a positive COVID-19 test off-campus, please report it to the campus COVID-19 team [here](#).

UC Santa Barbara's Student Health has been approved as a vaccine distribution site for frontline health care providers (Phase 1A), whose vaccinations are already underway. We hope that vaccines will soon be available for Phase 1B, which includes some campus employees in the highest risk categories (those over the age of 65, and essential workers whose jobs require their physical presence on campus), possibly as soon as next month. There are still many unknowns regarding distribution and timing, so if you are eligible to be vaccinated at an off-campus site at an earlier date, do take advantage of the opportunity. Achieving a high level of vaccination among campus community members will allow us to reopen the campus for in-person operations as soon as possible. Regardless of your vaccination status, anyone visiting or working on campus must continue to follow safety protocols, including wearing a mask and maintaining social distance of at least 6 feet, until further notice.

The Senate is pleased and grateful that Scott Grafton (Psychological and Brain Sciences) has assumed the role of campus COVID-Mitigation Program Leader for the next 6 months. He will be working closely with the Office of Research to oversee the campus research ramp-up and the gradual reopening of campus facilities. Recently, the UC Office of the President [stated](#) that all UC campuses are expected to resume in-person instruction in Fall 2021, subject to local and state health guidelines. We realize that fall planning is challenging for departments and individual faculty at this time, due to the evolving pandemic situation. We will keep you posted as new information about campus reopening plans becomes available.

Supporting our students. We understand that many students are experiencing high levels of stress which affect their ability to perform academically. The Senate's Undergraduate Council is considering measures to temporarily increase flexibility for P/NP options for winter and possibly even spring quarter, some of which have already been adopted by other UC campuses. Caution is necessary, because many P/NP decisions have unintended consequences for students' programs of study at the university, and beyond. We will announce decisions affecting Senate regulations regarding any changes to P/NP grading soon.

Instructors can direct students with urgent needs to the appropriate resources, including remote counseling, on the Student Wellbeing [website](#). The site food.ucsb.edu also has a lot of useful information about resources for students in need, including food, housing, financial, and well-being. You may find it helpful to inform students by showing this [slide](#) in your class; you may also choose to post the slide on your GauchoSpace course page (if you need the information in another format, contact Melissa Fontaine at Melissafontaine@ucsb.edu). Please direct questions about COVID-19 testing, quarantine/isolation housing support, and other issues related to university operations and resources to the Covid-19 call center at (805) 893-3113, or ucsb-covid19@ucsb.edu.

ESCI working group. In collaboration with the Executive Vice Chancellor, the Senate is establishing a new joint working group to recommend modifications to the ESCI teaching evaluations which are currently required in all courses. This initiative is based on an analysis of problems associated with our current ESCI system, conducted by a Senate *ad hoc* committee chaired by William Smith (MCDB). The task force report is available [here](#). The new working group will be charged with making recommendations by the end of the 2020-21 academic year.

Townhall meeting for junior faculty. The pandemic is disproportionately affecting the professional career development of many of our junior faculty. The Senate is organizing an upcoming Townhall meeting to hear from junior faculty about how the pandemic is impacting them. We will provide breakout groups to discuss issues of special concern, with the goal of identifying and prioritizing needs, gathering ideas, and working collaboratively on possible solutions. Key campus leaders will be present to participate in these discussions and inform on campus policies and procedures. Pre-registration will be required.

Faculty legislature meeting. The next meeting of the Faculty Legislature will take place on January 14, 2021 at 3:30 pm. All Senate members are warmly invited to attend; an email containing the Zoom information was distributed earlier this week. In addition to updates from Chancellor Yang and myself, you will hear from Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education Linda Adler-Kassner (Writing Program) about plans for the university's upcoming reaccreditation by WASCUC (WASC Senior College and University Commission). UC Santa Barbara must submit a report next year detailing our program assessment activities and outcomes. You will also hear from Stu Feinstein (MCDB and COVID-19 Response Team Coordinator) and Laura Polito (Medical Director, UCSB COVID-19 Response Team) regarding the campus testing program and vaccination plans. Attendees will have an opportunity to ask questions of our speakers.

Call for Senate volunteers. Are you passionate about faculty welfare? Diversity and equity? Undergraduate or graduate programs? Merit and promotion review? Strategic planning? Research policy and resources? Your Academic Senate works through its councils and committees to establish and oversee the academic regulations of the university and provide advice to the university's administrators. Any Senate member is eligible to serve. Please let us know your preferences by completing the [Senate Service Preference Form](#). The deadline to request an assignment for the 2021-22 academic year has been extended to January 31.

Stay safe everyone,
Susannah

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