The following message is being sent to all Academic Senate Members

Divisional Chair’s Newsletter - March 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,

As we approach the end of winter quarter, and the anniversary of a full year of living under the pandemic, I am glad to have plenty of promising news to report (at least, relative to what we have been living through recently).

**Employee vaccination update.** Santa Barbara County is starting to conduct vaccinations of employees in education (including higher education), although some locations may prioritize employees who have face-to-face contact with students. Unfortunately, Student Health Services (SHS) does not anticipate being able to continue offering vaccines to UCSB employees (beyond delivering second doses to those who have already received a first dose at SHS). This is a result of the recent change in the California vaccine distribution system, as described in the campus memo of March 9. Nevertheless, many faculty who are currently living locally have been able to make appointments recently through [Cottage Hospital](#). In addition, CVS pharmacies have started to offer vaccines to educators via [online appointments](#). Updated information about vaccine policies and eligibility is available on the university’s COVID-19 vaccine [webpage](#) and [myturn.ca.gov](#).

Faculty, staff, and students who have been fully vaccinated are required to continue to wear a mask and follow social distancing rules
on campus, but will not have to quarantine if exposed to someone infected with COVID, provided they have not had a positive COVID test themselves and are not experiencing symptoms. All campus community members are advised not to travel during Spring Break (or to take appropriate precautions if they must travel) due to still-high levels of infection in many locations around the country.

**University budget update.** Governor Newsom has proposed to fully restore the 2020 state cut to UC’s core funding, provide an increase in permanent funds, and supply significant one-time funds (mainly for deferred maintenance). However, the Governor’s proposal is just one step in the process leading up to confirmation of the University’s budget by the Legislature in June 2021. While there could be significant changes in the intervening time, it appears that our budget situation now is much brighter than it was just a few weeks ago. In addition, it seems likely that there will soon be additional federal assistance to help cover much of the university’s COVID-related expenses such as testing, vaccination, quarantine and isolation services for students, and losses in housing, dining and tuition revenues. This will be important because the Governor’s proposed budget restoration would not take effect until the next fiscal year, leaving us to manage the reduced level of state funding this year. Nevertheless, the university is no longer considering employee furloughs for budgetary reasons at this time. The ongoing structural deficit in the university’s operating budget still needs to be addressed, and will be the subject of discussion in the Chancellor’s Coordinating Committee on Budget Strategy in the spring quarter.

**Temporary suspension of P/NP grading regulations.** Recently, the Senate’s Undergraduate Council voted to recommend an expansion of Pass/Not Pass grading, to alleviate pandemic stress and unequal learning opportunities among our undergraduate students. The action requires a temporary suspension of Senate regulations governing grading, similar to the actions taken on an emergency basis during the Spring Quarter 2020. The Senate’s Executive Council approved the suspension as a temporary measure for Winter Quarter 2021. Participation by individual departments is optional, but for a department that opts in, all undergraduate classes offered by the department must be included (for logistical reasons, it is not feasible to
apply the measures to courses on an individual basis). The extension of grading regulation suspensions for spring and summer 2021 will be presented to and discussed by the Faculty Legislature at its meeting this afternoon (March 11, 2021). All faculty members are invited to attend, although voting is restricted to members of the Faculty Legislature. We expect a full return to regular grading policies in Fall Quarter 2021.

**Undergraduate campus move-in and Isla Vista.** In mid-January, the campus welcomed about 850 undergraduates back into campus apartments at single occupancy. These students were tested for COVID-19 upon arrival and continue to be tested weekly. The test positivity rate in this group is low (about 2%) and compliance with mandatory testing has been very high (above 95%). On this basis, students living in university housing appear to be much less impacted by the pandemic, on average, than students living in Isla Vista. There are no plans to expand the number of students living on campus in spring quarter, however, the campus is considering more use of student housing in the summer.

Student gatherings and non-compliance with masking in IV continue to be a concern, but Student Affairs reaches out to notify students when violations are reported by members of the community, and they have seen very few repeat offenses after such contact. If you have a concern regarding student behavior related to public health, you can report it [here](#). For serious, repeat offenses that violate the Student Code of Conduct, students can face academic sanctions. You can check the status of Student Affairs’ efforts on the [COVID-19 Violation Response Dashboard](#).

**Spring quarter planning.** Faculty are asked to continue to work remotely if possible during spring quarter, but most faculty offices are in buildings that have now been fully vetted for ventilation (see the [full list](#) for the most current status) and are available for use subject to scheduling by the appropriate building committee. Since local infection levels remain a concern, and public health experts believe there may be another surge in COVID infections in early spring, instruction for spring quarter and Summer Session will be predominantly remote, with only a small number of special classes being offered in-person. However, the campus is making preparations for a carefully controlled, partial
reopening of the Davidson Library and the Recreation Center early in spring quarter, local public health conditions permitting. When this happens, users will be required to make reservations, and to comply with weekly COVID-19 testing protocols.

**COVID-19 impact statements.** The campus has recognized the impact of the pandemic on faculty activities and the consequent repercussions for merits and promotions. Faculty are encouraged, but not required, to provide context about the impact of the pandemic on their scholarly activities, teaching, and service, by including a COVID-19 impact statement with their merit and promotion cases. The recommendation takes effect starting in fall 2021 and will continue for the next few years. Detailed instructions are posted on the Academic Personnel website.

**Junior faculty town hall meeting.** On February 11, 2021, the Academic Senate hosted a virtual town hall meeting to hear the concerns and ideas of our junior faculty whose career development has been impacted by the pandemic. About 80 junior faculty participated and contributed suggestions on topics ranging from research access, teaching and service accommodations, impacted merits and tenure, campus climate, and work-life balance. The result was very helpful insight for Senate leaders and university administrators on the challenges our junior faculty are facing. A summary of the issues discussed in the meeting and some of the actions the university is already taking to address the concerns of junior faculty will be posted on the Senate website shortly.

**Fall in-person teaching survey.** The university is hoping that public health conditions will be favorable for a return to in-person teaching in fall 2021. The Academic Senate is undertaking a survey of Senate faculty on their current preferences and concerns regarding fall quarter teaching, to inform campus planning. A personal survey link is being sent to all Senate members via email this week. **Please complete the survey no later than Tuesday, March 16.** The results will be posted on the Senate website by early spring quarter.
**ESCI revisions.** A joint Senate-Administration Teaching Evaluation Workgroup has been appointed to recommend revision or replacement of the current ESCI system, based on the findings of last year’s ESCI Taskforce Report that the system falls short of its goals of fairly assessing instructor effort and effectiveness. The workgroup is co-chaired by Rita Raley (Senate Vice Chair) and Linda Adler-Kassner (Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education). They have a charge to propose changes that could be implemented as early as fall 2021, while recognizing that more extensive changes may be needed and would require a longer timeframe.

**Faculty research and travel grants.** The Academic Senate is accepting applications for Faculty Research Grants until March 28, 2021. Any member of the Academic Senate Santa Barbara Division may apply for funding up to $20,000 to support faculty research and creative activities. Priority is given to junior faculty with a clear need for funding; projects for which no extramural funding source can be identified; requests for seed monies with high potential for impact or graduation to extramural funding; and requests that extend/augment work currently supported by extramural funds. Travel grants are also available to support participation of Senate members and graduate students in virtual conferences.

**Faculty legislature meeting.** The next meeting of the Faculty Legislature will take place this afternoon, March 11, at 3:30 pm. The agenda includes a report on the Junior Faculty Town Hall Meeting, a discussion and vote on extension of the suspension of P/NP grading regulations in spring quarter and summer sessions, and a report on the 2021 Academic Senate Elections. All Senate members are encouraged to attend, using the Zoom link sent by email last week.

Stay safe everyone,
Susannah

**Susannah L. Scott**
Divisional Chair, Academic Senate

susannah.scott@senate.ucsb.edu