

COPYRIGHT NOTICE. Quotations from this article must be attributed to the author. Unless otherwise indicated, copyright for this article belongs to the author, who has granted Emergence first-appearance, non-exclusive rights of publication.

A Letter to the Government of the UC System: A Plea for Change

Veronica Smith

Dear President Yudof and the UC Regents,

I was sitting at breakfast yesterday in one of the dining halls on campus, and I heard a very upsetting conversation taking place between two women at the table next to me. These students were discussing their inability to get the classes they needed to complete their majors. All the classes that the students needed were full, and their chances of getting into the classes from a wait list were slim to none. This conversation is one that can be heard all over the UCSB campus. I am sure that it is being heard across all the UC campuses. Students of all grade levels are expected almost to battle one another online, vying for the very few spaces that are available in classrooms. There are fewer qualified teachers to lead engaging classes, fewer staff members to help students understand the complicated bureaucracy, and, finally, more students eager to learn and go out into the world with a diploma from a first class research institution. We students, as a whole, are paying more for less from the UC System.

I understand that your two offices must receive letters and emails similar to mine on an almost constant basis. You all realize that the UC system, once the most respected public university system in the world, is in crisis; however, to know something is different from to experience it from the front lines. As a third-year student in the Humanities, I have a unique perspective on what it means to receive a degree from a UC campus. In the relatively short time I have been at UC-Santa Barbara, I have watched the campus, and the larger system, deteriorate. That being said, I do not want this letter to be another sad story. I have a purpose; I want to work toward a more positive and successful future for the entire UC System. I have studied, read, and asked many questions, and I hope that some of my suggestions for the future will be taken seriously by the Office of the President and the Regents. It is my dream that some of my suggestions might actually be implemented, but I would be grateful to simply be heard and to be taken seriously. I would like the UC System to listen to those it is supposed to serve, and to change its attitude in order to restore its previous glory. It pains me, and my parents, to imagine that my college degree from the University of California might not be as valuable as the same degree would have been ten or fifteen, or even five years ago.

The first problem that *must* be addressed is the money. President Yudof, you have made reference to the largest monetary problem for the system is the massive cuts in funding from the state government. According to you, since 1990 the budget has been cut by fifty percent, twenty percent in the last year. This undeniably creates an atmosphere of panic for everyone connected to the system. We students have experienced fees increase by eighty five percent since 1990, and a thirty five percent increase has been approved for this school term alone. For those who are writing the checks to pay for schooling, it feels as though students and parents are solely making up the difference that was once provided by the state legislature. Fees in 1990 were a mere \$1624, compared to today's cost of \$10,302. These are no longer nominal student fees, as has been outlined in the California Master Plan for Higher Education. Fees were intended to support auxiliary costs on campus such as residential services and parking. However, for the last thirty years fees have steadily and constantly increased, and they have been mis-marked for

educational purposes. Students are well aware of the fact that they are now paying tuition to attend any one of the different UC campuses.

What has also become blatantly obvious is the fact that the services these fees were supposed to support are dwindling. The campuses are cutting back hours, laying off staffers, and closing their doors completely. Students rely on services such as Student Health, CLAS, and Counseling and Career Services, just to name a few, to succeed with the high demands and fast pace of university life. These services, described as auxiliary, are in reality central to the livelihood of students. Without these different services provided across the UC system, there is going to be tremendous fall-out in terms of the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of students. The UC prides itself on creating well rounded individuals, but when students are not stimulated and supported in all areas, they will fail to have the success that has been the UC legacy for decades. Knowing that, for the foreseeable future fees will only continue to rise, students deserve a commitment from the UC leadership to protect the services that are so central to student wellness. Students need to have something tangible in return from the governing body of this institution, and putting a stop to the destruction of services is a very real start to showing students, faculty, staff, and parents that they are all the *number one* priority at UC.

The second part of this money crunch that needs to be addressed is where the fees are actually going. I implore you to make that information easily attainable for students and the general public. The budget available through the Office of the President is highly informative, but also incredibly dense. It is almost two hundred pages long, and it requires a complex working knowledge of business to fully comprehend. It should be the number one priority to inform students easily and openly about where their money is going. If student fees are no longer covering these auxiliary departments on campus, where exactly do our educational fees of nearly \$7,000 go? Pie charts or graphs should be handed out at every campus to every student, professor, parent and staff member, so that honest and real discussions can take place to understand how to solve the current problems. Pie charts and graphs should be given out to prospective student and their family to understand what the current system can deliver. Having an uninformed student population should not be how the UC operates. The budget should be readily available, and provided in laymen's terms, so that every person can have an honest understanding of the budget, and imputation how to change the current situation.

The need for an open flow of communication about money is not limited to student fees. Every dollar put into any of the UC campuses is directed to a fund entitled the "UC Regents." There is this huge pot of money that is constantly being fed, and funds emptied, but it is very ambiguous as to what goes where. There is no one keeping meticulous accounts about how much is being contributed from each individual campus, or how much is being spent by each individual campus, or if those figures balance. There is never a direct unit for unit measurement of who is spending and who is donating equivalently. With this system no one is able to challenge UC's accounting practices, which lessens the accountability on the part of the leadership. I propose to change this convoluted accounting. I ask that an accountant inspect the money in the UC Regents fund now. For the future, funds from each individual UC campus need to be kept separately and to be closely monitored. For example, UCSB's contributions to the account from tuition, research grants, donations, government funding and any other fee that may be imposed from parking tickets to library late fees should be tabulated, as their bank account. From that account, and that account only, can UCSB spend money. This would follow for all of the other campuses as well.

In addition new accountability in campus spending, I believe that the Regents should be broken up into committees and assigned to each UC. Each group of Regents would be

accountable for the spending practices of that UC, and must report to the other committees, and to the President. With this system, each campus would have its own representatives to discuss grievances with, and to keep track of the most miniscule details about money for each particular campus. Also, in this system, each campus is accountable immediately and directly to those who are funding them. The UC's would continue to be collaborative, and continue to be a system. Each school would be accountable to the others, and schools and committees of Regents could work on solving problems in equivalent problem areas, but there would no longer be this messy mush pot of money that all the campuses are squabbling over. Creating a system where each school needs to take responsibility does not make the system weaker, it actually builds confidence in all students system-wide that there are people immediately looking out for them, and all the schools operate in the same manner. It shows consistency and commitment to every member of the UC community, and helps ensure that the system runs smoothly.

There is no doubt that many of the goals the UC has thrived on for decades are now in crisis, because of the current status of California's economy. That being said, I would like to offer some concerns about current funding directions. I see first hand at my site, that there is constant new building taking place on my campus. In addition to what I see, President Yudof, you alluded to the fact that the problem with overcrowding in the system has to do with the fact that there has been only one new UC campus in the last forty years. What I would propose, is that these new buildings may be a lure for prospective students, but to current students they are a rude awakening that that money could have been spent on a teacher or staff member. It could have been spent on a CLAS tutoring program, or more classes in any department on campus. I agree that beauty is important to happiness in a given location, but I urge you to spend money on refurbishing classrooms and buildings that already exist, making them beautiful at a lower cost, and maintaining the campus. I think that first and foremost, money coming into the UC system should be spent on personnel. I find qualified teachers, staff members, and smaller classes to be my biggest desire as a upper-division student. At this point in my college career, I have put in the hours with 200, 600, 800 person lectures with professors who never knew my name, and TA's who were overworked. I do not want to have to go back to that as a junior and senior. I want small intimate classes that foster exciting discussion, and that force me to think vastly outside of my comfort zone.

It is unrealistic to accept more students than the university is designed to hold, as happened at UCSB with this most recent first year class, and then simply build more buildings and think that will solve the problem. Those classrooms require trained and enthusiastic teachers to lead the students, and that is what the UC government should be securing. UC has been unquestioned as one of the best research universities in the world for decades, and that stellar reputation was built on the backs of scholars who gave so much of themselves to teaching undergraduates. Teaching cannot fall to the wayside in this system. We want smaller classes, not more elaborate structures. Students come into the university with the number one expectation to learn, and that should be the focus of each and every professor on campus. This should be reinforced with competitive faculty salaries, with continued hiring of top-tier professors.

Accountability is the number one issue facing the governing bodies of the UC for students. First, meetings of the UC Regents should be open to the public, and the Regents should be open to hearing from the public. Individuals affected by the university have a voice when it comes to solving the crises of this system. The minutes from those meetings should also be available to show concerned community members what took place, and what is being implemented. The Regents should not operate under a veil of secrecy, and should not be entitled

to make decisions they do not have to account for. The Regents have to be accountable to their "constituents", students, parents, faculty, and staff, and they need to realize that those are the people they are serving.

Secondly, both the Office of the President and the Regents need to get away from privatization of the university. Individual corporations, special interests, and individuals cannot be the sole beneficiaries of research. Academic freedom, for students and faculty members is paramount in the university setting. The Regents and the President, should put aside their business affiliations when they are making decisions about the future of the university. I am not naïve enough to think that people can make completely unbiased decisions, especially in a high stakes environment such as yours, but I do believe there is a difference in voting for what you *believe* is right, and what you think could make you money. I think the Regents and the President are brilliant people, I would just like for them to put themselves in the position of students when they are voting, rather than as business people or lawyers or bankers. I think if the Regents and the President seriously took into account the perspective of what students have to go through in today's economy to earn a degree, some votes might change. Please, think about how desperately we want to be in these institutions, learning from these professors, emerging with these degrees. This commitment to the university is a lifetime commitment and your votes impact that commitment greatly.

Thirdly, I would like to propose a few procedural suggestions. I feel that the Regents are an important governing body in the UC system. That being said, I think it is paramount that each and every Regent, at each and every appointment undergoes a confirmation process by the state legislature. It is required, but it has not been happening. It is important to have a third party objectively look at these appointments and ask the tough questions without any bias. The people of the state of California, and especially the students attending the UC's have a right to know what the people governing them stand for, where they come from, and what they have done in the past, in a very open and honest forum. I am simply holding fast to the need for government officials of any kind to follow all procedural steps, and to complete them in a dignified manner. It is important for the university system to be as transparent as possible, and this is a huge step toward silencing your critics.

Finally, I would like to suggest that more students, and more individuals with a commitment to education be selected as Regents. With only one student sitting on the board, the majority group on the UC campuses is the most underrepresented. Students should have a legitimate voice on the Board of Regents, and they should be respected as knowing what students need most. Having more student voices on the Board, puts the Regents immediately in touch with the constituents they are serving. Also, having people highly committed to education on the Board is also paramount. This does not mean that the Board needs to be made up of teachers, professors, college administrators. It means that any member of the California community that is looking to be appointed to the Board of Regents needs to show that he or she has made education a priority. This can come in diverse forms. It may be a lawyer who did an admirable amount of pro-bono work for school districts, or a business person who donated some of his goods or services to help school children, or a banker who teaches economics classes at the local community college. The Regents need to have an interest in serving education, and to have demonstrated that in the past. Without this passion for education, there is a fear that Regents can become detached from the system they are representing.

Finally, keeping with the idea of a new mindset, please re-evaluate the direction of the university. I am not a politician, I am not an economist, I am simply a student who cares very

deeply for the school I attend, the professors I work with, and the staff members who make this institution run. I do not pretend to know the answer to every problem, but I need to let those in power know there are other solutions out there. People do not have to be happy with the status quo. I am not happy that my parents are paying more than \$10,000 a year for my education, but I have learned that I am one of the lucky ones, who will graduate in four years without debt, and go into the working world. I want change for those across this state that are not as fortunate as I am. I want change for those two women sitting at breakfast talking about their classes. Most of all, I want change so that this school, and this system is in a little bit better shape than when I entered it. I am simply one student with a voice looking to be heard, and my hope is that when you listen you will stand for change beside me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica Smith

Annotated Bibliography

Bondgraham, Darwin. "Sung a Lot of Songs: I've Made Some Bad Rhymes...".
<http://darwinbondgraham.blogspot.com/2009/11/past-chair-of-uc-board-of-regents.html>. Web 27 Nov 2009.

This is an article about Richard Blum, his shady dealings and their effects on the whole UC governing body. It has a lot to do with his arms dealing, and also nuclear power and how that has destroyed the Regents' and President's ability to correctly govern. I used the parts about separating the business self from the Regent self in the letter.

Courtesy of the Office of the President. *California Master Plan for Higher Education: Major Features*.

http://ucfuture.universityofcalifornia.edu/documents/ca_masterplan_summary.pdf.

I used this in both forms of the letter, the madwoman and the real version. I used it when discussing the goals of fees, what they were intended for, and how they stand now.

Fradenburg, Aranye. Interview 16 Feb. 2010.

I learned so much from Professor Fradenburg, and used a lot of her conversation to shape my own ideas for change in the UC system. I used her thoughts throughout this letter, and she really gave me a lot of ammunition to think about how to better make change. She put into perspective for me what it means to be an intellectual, and how you are viewed from the outside. She had so many great ideas for how to change the UC system, but she was also very realistic about what could happen. Her realism helped me shape my tone, and what I thought might actually happen, if they read my letter and decided to use it. The notes from this interview are attached.

Gordon, Larry. "UC Regents committee approves student fee increases; at least 14 protesters arrested at meeting at UCLA". *Los Angeles Times*. 18 Nov. 2009. Print
<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2009/11/a-university-of-california-board-of-regents-committee-today-approved-a-series-of-controversial-increases-in-student-fees-that.html>.

I used this for the figures on fee increases over the last few decades. It has a great chart of what has been happening with fees since 1979, and the most recent fee increases. I used it in both letters.

Montiel, Steve. Interview 9 Mar 2010.

This is a response to the email I sent to the Office of the President. Mr. Montiel is a Media Relations Representative. Most of the text of his interview was not all that helpful, but I did use his like to the budget. The budget is very long and it is from this document that I talked about the budget and how to make it more accessible. My original email and the response are attached.

Newfield, Christopher. Interview. 23 Feb 2010.

Professor Newfield's interview was still very upset about the way the university is going. I thought a lot about him when I was writing my mad woman letter. I also used it to be a counterpoint for the voice of Mark Yudof. It was helpful to have one side of Yudof that was positive and one that was negative. I am not sure that any of his direct ideas made their way into the final product, but he was constantly in my head, and I used him as a gauge for if I was going too far or not far enough with my tone. The email interview is attached.

University of California. *2010-11 Budget for Current Operations: Budget Detail as Presented to the Regents for Approval*

<http://budget.ucop.edu/rbudget/201011/201011BudgetforCurrentOperationsBudgetDetailrev.pdf>

I used this for the budget figures and also how to make the budget more accessible to students. The part on students was really helpful for me, and it was the only section I really focused on for this project.

Yudof, Mark. "Presentation to the Joint Committee of the Master Plan for Higher Education".

<http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/article/22500>.

Web 7 Dec. 2009.

This speech was my template for what I wanted to respond to. Reading it made me really angry, so I knew it was a good place to start. I based my structure off of this document, and used some of Yudof's direct quotes in the letter.