

2001 - 2003 Biobib Survey

Defies Emeriti Mortality

A news headline in 2003 reported a stunning matter:

MINERS REFUSE TO WORK AFTER DEATH

This sobering situation utterly failed to stir UC campuses, however, because here things are often the other way around. Academic miners by nature, many UC emeriti pursue their professional work unabated no matter how many colleagues drop around them. In fact some seem driven to persist into the Great Beyond, as though there's an Elysium where tenure blesses those who publish after perishing.

Such commitment, or compulsion risking commitment, has appeared in the results of the Council of DC Emeriti Associations' biobibliographic survey for July 2001 through June 2003, the third of a biennial series launched in 1997. Reported this summer, the university-wide tally and supporting materials have been forwarded to all chancellors, selected deans, the President's Office, and the Regents.

This time a new question asked retirees whether they were more, or less, or about as busy as they had been before retirement. Of those who took a moment from more serious work to answer, 10% checked more, 25 % less, and 65% the same.

Odds don't favor attempts to pry much biobibliographic data from emeriti since most bask in their liberation from the repeated nuisance of similar prying in their old promotion-ladder days. Then too, although the impressive data of former surveys have promoted emeriti prestige and benefits, still-youthful souls may find the siren call of a recreational hour more seductive than a biobib form. So it would seem on one campus where survey fuses fizzled at a 2% response rate. On another, however, spirited communal incentives coaxed forth 46%. And all told 725 emeriti responded, 21 more than for the 1999-2001 biennium and 20% of those canvassed.

From a broad perspective, a landmark distinguished this survey: for the first time since the mid '90s, the number of non-VERIP respondents (pre-1990 and post-1994 retirees) nearly equaled the number of VERIP respondents (1990-1994 retirees). As the three VERIPs had abruptly lured many faculty into departing before they planned to, such emeriti formed not only an exceptionally large retirement group, but also a younger one with more continuing academic involvement than typical of emeriti before or after them. Now the relative decline in their numbers, and the six to eight years since the last VERIP, largely neutralized the VERIP warp, making this survey the most balanced, "normal" one to date.

Reflecting this normalcy, figures this time show somewhat less teaching and service than in the previous biennium. Thwarting reason, however, they also reveal that emeriti publications actually increased. So to make an argument fit the data one may guess that age is becoming ever more youthful; or new emeriti reflect the increasing prestige of the university; or surveyors have slipped; or perhaps pre-retirement promotion priorities prevail perpetually as academic miners among us seek immortality more than ever.

Whatever the perversity, publication entries for the 2001-2003 biennium are striking: 301 books, 2,949 articles, and 612 book chapters. Not far behind are 379 book reviews, 730 abstracts, 385 professional reports, and 203 consulting reports. Meanwhile, colleagues with an artistic bent report 27 literary works, 175 art works (many displayed in 72 exhibitions), 50 film or video productions, and 298 performances of music, dance, or theater.

In pursuing this plethora, respondents utilized 121 extramural grants, hiring 247 graduate research assistants, post-doctoral fellows, other professional staff, undergraduates, and secretaries. About 10% express a need for funding, and another 12% could use secretarial help, a laboratory, or office space. The fact that 352 report having campus space, however, suggests that most campuses have been accommodating, perhaps reflecting an increased awareness of emeriti contributions.

Responses to queries about emeriti teaching, on the other hand, flag a matter that might be actively addressed. Given current budget cuts and objections to the university's reliance on non-faculty instructors, emeriti seem to be an underutilized resource. Since the previous biennium, the number of respondents teaching on their home campuses declined from 211 to 179, a drop probably reflecting expiring VERIP recall arrangements more than expiring emeriti. As talents of emeriti seldom retire with them, some of the 107 who report teaching elsewhere, and many of their colleagues, might have been tapped closer to home.

As it is, many were often tap-tapped for professional and university service. Although their numbers declined from the last biennium, 155 served on professional committees, with 75 employed as officers. Editorial appointments were held by 187 who, along with other respondents, reviewed a total of 881 articles for hundreds of journals. The repute suggested by such activities emerged in 186 professional honors.

Meanwhile departments snared 112 from this group for various slots plus 179 for doctoral committees, and Academic Senate Committees on Committees, desperate to fill vexing vacancies, seized scores, depositing 94 in nooks and crannies of the Senate. One even chaired a division. Administrative demands were not far behind, engaging 75 while 41 took on advisory roles and emeriti interests attracted 85. "Other" committees employed 37, and fund raising occupied 19, a significant number since emeriti financial contributions to the University totaled \$ millions in the biennium.

Combined with work on 253 local, state, and national committees and support groups, survey respondents thus filled at least 1,237 service slots besides their research, publishing, teaching, artistic, and recreational activities. In toto, the results of the survey provide a spirited riposte to budget woes currently swirling through the University as though it were Florida, echoing another headline of 2003:

TYPHOON RIPS THROUGH CEMETARY HUNDREDS DEAD

Not if we can help it.

Moses Greenfield & Charles Berst for CUCEA