

Exceptionally Dire Times Call for 2009-2012 Emeriti Biobib Survey

This fall CUCEA (the Council of UC Emeriti Associations) will be launching its eighth biobibliographic survey of emeriti—this time a triennial version—and the need for strong participation by emeriti will be even greater than ever.

As academic thrills go, it will be hard to match the attention the 2007-2009 survey attracted: After a year of multiple meetings and campus consultations, President Yudof's special Task Force on Post-Retirement Benefits gathered in May last year to forge advice to the President and Regents about how to provide "sustainable" employee benefits, given inadequate resources, when—AHHhh! —It received the survey's 52-page report.

Flashing upon that grim and touchy scene, the survey's profuse data about emeriti scholarship, grants, teaching, professional activities, university and community service, etc.etc. —Most all of it *pro bono*, FREE! —Beamed altruistically like blessings from Above. Accordingly, a summary of this beneficence climaxed the task force's report, to which the survey booklet's 52-pages were added as an appendix forwarded to the President, his officers, and the Regents.

But what about this year's edition?

Acute as budgetary problems were three years ago, even more draconian cuts in state support are radically compounding UC's troubles now. Unprecedented increases in student tuition and administrative economies are scraping bones throughout the system. Can the University, with scant funding signs ahead, truly sustain traditionally generous retirement benefits?

Well, that depends; sort of . .

"Sustainable," we've seen, may be relative, and how much is "generous"? Complacency about such matters might not, well, always be well. How much about benefits can we assume?

Retirement Heist, a recent book by Ellen Schultz, cites a private-sector instance: "Gary Skarka had a rewarding middle-management career at AT&T, along with some of the best retirement benefits in the country. But instead of enjoying a comfortable retirement, he is working as a security guard." Mr. Skarka expected an annual pension of \$50,000, but financial shifts at AT&T now justify just \$18,000, minus \$6,000 for his share of health benefits.

Could anything this dire happen at UC? Actually, once upon a time a version of it did: In the 1950s a UCLA emeritus, simply living too long, had to make ends meet by ending his days as a night watchman at a Westwood department store.

Luckily such deplorable problems prompted historic reforms spurred, by a single feisty emeritus, now best known for an emeriti award in his name. Award materials observe that "CONSTANTINE PANUNZIO (1884-1964) was a professor of sociology at UCLA from 1931 until his retirement in

1952. It is largely to Professor Panunzio that UC emeriti owe the present pension system, established by The Board of Regents after they received a six-page memorandum from Professor Panunzio. Edward Dickson, who was Chairman of The Board of Regents at the time (1954) described Dr. Panunzio as the architect of the UC Retirement System.”

Nourished by that system and thus most immediately appreciating its benefits, campus emeriti associations proliferated, eventually linking, giving emeriti a statewide presence as CUCEA in 1987.

Most broadly weighing against cuts in benefits recently is the overwhelming sentiment among 12,000 responses to a random poll cited by the Post-Retirement Benefits Task Force, emphatically confirming that “the Post-Employment Benefit package is a key motivator for talented faculty and staff coming to the University and staying . . .”

So UC’s future favors favorable emeriti benefits, and our last emeriti biobib survey played an especially welcome role in brightening those odds at a strategic time.

Ultimately, beyond exorcisms of “Begone, Skarka!” in support of optimal emeriti benefits lies the persuasiveness of Constantine Panunzio’s points years ago and broad faculty and emeriti sentiment, all of which coalesce pointedly in CUCEA and its campus components.

And as CUCEA’s biobib surveys clearly, soundly, and extensively document the academic devotion, distinction, and altruism of so many faculty, even in “retirement,” they make a strong case for an ethos of reciprocal generosity. Essentially emeriti welfare is the University’s too.

This makes your participation in the upcoming survey particularly important. Many can serve many more, the dynamic sum of which can serve and save UC, if its distinction is to be saved at all.

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