

CUCEA Survey a Success

Emeriti Biobibs Bedazzle

A Canadian academic once confessed that he had gone into teaching to escape an English civil service job. Cannier than his bureaucratic colleagues, he had noticed how many suffered lethally dull work for forty years because government positions were so good, but then he died just months after retiring, which was why they were so good..

Most UC emeriti leap over such haplessness, with many gladly taking retirement bounty and then, as though on-the-shelf life is short, not acting their age. Apparently energized by their work, they have little call to expire. Fittingly, library cards of UCLA emeriti are routinely renewed for 30 years..

And accordingly, a recent university-wide survey reveals emeriti deflecting geriatric degeneration by busily contributing to their profession and the University. Conducted by a committee chaired by Moses Greenfield for the Council of UC Emeriti Associations (CUCEA), the survey is the second of a biennial series. It improves upon its predecessor, in which the nine campuses surveyed various time spans. To correct this, Greenfield requested campus representatives to gather specific data on emeriti activities through June 1999. For most, this meant 1997-99. Since Berkeley and Riverside had already reported on 1997-98 in the first survey, however, one must conflate that data with their 1998-99 update this time around for a clear university-wide overview of the two-year period..

The results are well worth the modest computing. Out of a total of 3,739 emeriti, the survey pried responses from 1,084, twenty-nine percent whose only incentive for the bother of hunkering down to yet another biobib form was to become a fraction of a digit in a statistic. Surveyors have expressed regret that some eminently productive persons did not take the time, but the thousand-plus who did amount to a significant critical mass, and considering their activities, a weighty one.

For the two-year period, this group reports authoring 449 books, 2,114 articles, 497 book chapters, and 472 book reviews. Besides these, they composed 284 abstracts, 331 professional reports, and 97 consulting reports. And in the arts, a portion of them produced and/or directed 61 films or videos while others created or performed in 178 music, dance, or theater productions, exhibited 130 art works, and wrote 29 creative literary works.

To further some of these activities the emeriti secured 225 grants which supported or helped support 372 staff, ranging from graduate assistants and post-docs to professionals.

Meanwhile a good number committed themselves to the classroom, with 303 teaching on their home campuses and 169 lured to posts elsewhere. Many also aided their campus's graduate programs. All told, they served on 259 doctoral committees.

Other than for teaching and some outside consulting work, the extent of pro bonoservice by emeriti is one of the most impressive revelations of the survey. During the two-year period, members of this group participated in or chaired 119 administrative committees, 169 department committees, and 143 Academic Senate committees. Similarly they were active in support groups: 58 in advisory bodies, 92 in emeriti bodies, and 32 in fund raising.

This last reflects the potential of emeriti both as promoters of philanthropy to the University, and as philanthropists themselves. Emeriti have contributed \$millions in the past two years with a generosity most notably embodied by a former faculty member (officially on leave, but to all effects an emeritus since he is unlikely--too rich--to return) who has donated \$20 million to UCI and \$30 million to UCLA.

Complementing campus activities are community service and service to a great range of academic disciplines. Given the extent of their academic involvement, it's remarkable that these thousand-plus emeriti have any time for community concerns, but the survey reveals their participation in 294 community entities, with 81 receiving honors for their efforts.

In service to their disciplines, the national and international prestige members of this group have earned through their scholarship has received both implicit and explicit recognition. Evolving from their academic distinction are their memberships in 290 professional committees and offices they hold in 84 of them, their 277 editorial appointments, and the delights of reviewing 707 articles for professional journals--all impressive but not surprising signs of the luster they give UC. Highlighting such esteem are 214 professional honors, from honorary doctorates, fellowships, and a U.K. knighthood, to distinguished alumni awards, lifetime achievement awards, distinguished service awards, and a Nobel prize (unmentioned by its recipient).

Recognizing this distinction to some degree, campuses have provided space for 605 of these respondents. Thus relatively few emeriti express a need for funding (76), office space (46), laboratory space (15), and secretarial help (49). Given widespread provisions for emeriti space and support, however, these cases deserve attention if they signal inequities in or between departments and schools, a not-uncommon situation.

Finally, the activities of the survey's contingent bring them to their campuses, on average, nearly three times a week, a remarkable fact when they might otherwise be frolicking with hobbies or interests they report enjoying, such as travel, the tango, marathons, metal smithing, flute making, jazz horn, learning languages, sheep ranching, rollerblading, white water rafting, and race-car racing, each of which outnumbers television in the survey.

Just why do so many emeriti continue to write, delve, volunteer, and serve so diligently? Type A personalities? Conditioning? Neuroses? An obsessive extending of UC's promotion ladder, like Jacob's up to heaven? No doubt some of these forces throb at the heart of the syndrome, with a perverse pleasure principle joining in . Yet this survey illustrates that devotion and altruism are deeply there too, surfacing in a spectrum of ways that increase UC's vitality and reputation.

Meanwhile it's quite possible that reality also wags its finger, as in a Chronicle of Higher Education cartoon which pictures two aged, slightly melancholy academics contemplating a notice tacked on a bulletin board. One laments, "Poor old Ainsworth. Published and published, but perished all the same."

Still, odds are that Ainsworth didn't perish like an English civil servant. This survey suggests that, beyond aches and AARP and Medicare, active minds and native altruism tend to keep this extraordinary group going and going.

Then too, most good scholarship is very slow to age.

Charles Berst, for CUCEA

[Editorial note: The first biobibliographic survey, also summarized by Charles Berst, was assembled through the dedicated efforts of Moses Greenfield, UCLA, including the update covering activity through July 1999. We thank Dr. Berst for his sparkling summary and Dr. Greenfield for creating the survey.]