

The Ins and Outs of CUCEA's Biobibliographic Survey

The inaugural biobibliographic survey of all UC emeriti sheds fresh light on their continuing contributions to the University. Administered by a committee of the Council of UC Emeriti Associations, the survey drew 1,081 responses by last spring. Consistent with national trends, it finds that many emeriti choose to work after leaving regular employment. Distinctively, however, few retirees nationwide contribute so much, pro bono, to their former employer as UC emeriti do.

First of all, few contribute so much in terms of professional quantity. In the course of a year, 86 emeriti respondents served on administrative committees, 142 served on committees of the Academic Senate (one chairing a campus senate), 173 on department committees, 242 on doctoral committees and 246 on other campus bodies or support groups. All in a spirit of philanthropy.

Less purely philanthropic, but for a finite fraction of their former salaries, 267 emeriti also taught from one to five courses on their campuses. Meanwhile, in a sign of professional repute, 171 taught at campuses across the country and abroad.

This last puts emeriti esteem hand-in-hand with high numbers. Chicken-first or egg-first conundrums won't fly as to what comes first, a distinguished faculty or a distinguished university. Hands down, faculty take off with the honors. Today's emeriti are yesterday's builders of UC's prestige. The survey updates this as it suggests that most of its respondents retired at or near the peak of their careers, and in many cases are still up there. Some 63 percent of them stepped down during 1990-1994, apparently seduced by the ever-higher karats of the University's three golden handshakes. By contrast, only 15 percent retired during 1985-1989, and just 5 percent from 1995 to 1998. Clearly, the gold of hard times for UC prompted an exceptional number to depart before they had planned to.

So as a group, emeriti offer their campuses not only experience, distinction, and institutional memory, but also are younger, more professionally oriented, and will be longer-lived than any previous emeriti generation.

Striking evidence of this appears in their grants and publications during a typical year following the 1990-1994 exodus. A total of 206 respondents acknowledge extramural grants. Their published books number 256; book chapters, 262; abstracts, 157; book reviews, 360; and articles, 1,120. Furthermore, derivatives of such prolific production were 207 editorial appointments and the reading of some 398 articles submitted for publication. And in related venues, 199 served on committees of professional groups, with 117 holding offices in the groups. Then too, the respondents authored at least 253 consulting or professional reports..

Their participation in the arts seems nominal only by comparison: one hundred art works exhibited; 52 films, videos, or performing arts productions; 52 works of literature; and 31 instances of other creative activity. And in their spare time, besides a kaleidoscopic assortment of travel, sports, and hobbies, they diverted themselves with membership in 233 community organizations.

Special honors for these activities--165 honors from a great spectrum of professional groups and 233 from community groups--not only highlight the broadly based eminence of emeriti achievement, but also serve the University as it shares in the credit. In rankings of academic quality, a university's reputation often trails its present reality by five to twenty-five years. So UC may bask in kudos earned by today's emeriti well into the new millennium.

By that time, biobibliographic surveys such as this one, which heralds biennial successors, may be commonplace. They should also be more precise. This time, campuses generally followed the format of a UCLA survey, forwarded by Moses Greenfield, chair of the survey committee. Yet tabulations varied in respect to years covered, depth of detail, and respondent error. Most campus representatives tried to compensate for respondent error, and this summary boils down variables in dates and details, in order to produce a yearly average. Consequently, some summary figures could be off by 10%. Above and beyond such a margin for error, however, the data are compelling and the strengths of the survey's gist remain.

Two survey queries, one a singleton and the other a set, differed from the rest by focusing on emeriti needs, not accomplishments. The first asked, "Do you have University space?" On most campuses, Yes's were in the 60% range; except for San Diego, which topped out at 80%, followed by Irvine at 73%, with Santa Barbara bottoming down at 51%. The second query asked, "Is help needed for: Funding Office Space - Laboratory - Secretarial - " Here, the most needs were felt at Berkeley (averaging 12% per category), Santa Cruz (averaging 11%), and Irvine (averaging 10%), while, at just 3%, emeriti at Santa Barbara expressed the least discontent. Comparing the high percentage of space yet high expressed needs at Irvine with the lowest percentage of space and the least concern about needs at Santa Barbara may delight academic psychologists.

More pertinent to canny administrators, however, could be the number of emeriti who checked "Fund Raising" as a part of their University service. Besides being recognized for the institutional value of their academic prestige, emeriti might warrant attention for their fund-raising potential. Then too, a year ago one campus was surprised to find that emeriti themselves had donated nearly \$10 million through its development office.

Finally, what about emeriti who failed respond to the survey? One can hardly assume inactivity or activity. Queried as to whether he had filled out the form, an eminent emeritus (between invited lectures at two Eastern universities), chuckled No as a blessing of emeritude: "Hell, I used to fill out one of these damned things every year!" Another was too busy addressing the hubbub over his Nobel prize to do so. As to the impressive activities of those who did, a chancellor observed, "Why of course. They're all type A personalities."

That may be the point.

Charles Berst, for CUCEA

[Editorial note: The biobibliographic survey, summarized here by Charles Berst, was assembled through the dedicated efforts of Moses Greenfield, UCLA. An update is being prepared that will cover activity through July 1999. We look forward to Dr. Berst's summary of the latest survey.]