**Contract Action Watch**

**Bargaining starts with a bang, as members turn out to testify**

UPTE’s elected re-
searcher/tech (RX/TX) bargaining team met with UC representatives twice this past month, first at Berkeley on March 4-6, then at UCLA on March 18-19. At the first session in Berkeley, over 150 passionate and vocal members were on hand to support the UPTE team, and give personal testimony on the issues important to them. UPTE’s bargaining team has put the university on notice that members will no longer accept below-market wages and the broken step system.

Researchers, science techs, and others made presentations on how dramatically underpaid they are compared to those who do the same work outside UC. Several asked how UC intended to keep quality staff if it continued to undermine benefits and pensions.

**Members send UC a message**

At the second session at UCLA, over 100 members turned out to observe, and 13 of them addressed the UC team, sending a strong message that they are tired of their needs being ignored by the university.

“UC continues to falsely tie our wage increases to state funding,” said chief negotiator Kevin Rooney. “Total compensation is high on our priority list, as is eliminating the benefits waiver that allows UC to increase our health care premiums at its discretion.”

Other priorities include holding UC accountable for making sure employees are properly classified, following federal and state labor laws and regulations regarding overtime, health, and safety.

**Ground rules were a sticking point at the first session. UC wasted the first 3 days of bargaining trying to pressure the union to agree to restrict non-unit employees from being present at the sessions.**

This means that UPTE’s union coalition right to freedom of speech,” says Rooney, adding that the UPTE team’s goal is to provide open and transparent negotiations.

**Take action now on petition to faculty**

Thousands of UPTE-CWA members are signing petitions to the faculty and supervisors requesting them to support fair wages and the maintenance of benefits and pension plans. Most tech and researcher members have excellent working relationships with faculty.

“We have great pride and pleasure in our work,” notes UPTE president Jeeger Kalmijn, a researcher at UCSD, “and usually our supervisors support our efforts to get fair pay because they want to retain quality trained staff.” Kalmijn notes that faculty and supervisors will also be affected by benefits and pension changes, so it is in their interest to be supportive of the union’s goals.

The petition is being circulated in every workplace. Please contact the UPTE activist in your area to sign on. If you need a copy to print out, you can download it at <www. upte.org/facultypetition.pdf>.

**MEET YOUR BARGAINING TEAM**

Kevin Rooney • Environmental Health and Safety Technician, San Francisco (chief negotiator)

I’ve seen many problems suffered by our members that we haven’t been able to address or improve because of our current contract language. I’d like to be part of changing things for the better. The main goal I’d like to achieve is a fair and equitable pay structure for all. We also need arbitrariness and accountability for reclassifications and health and safety.

Ling Morgan • Staff Research Associate, Irvine

UPTE is a great organization. I would like to make an effort to get better benefits for all our members. I think the importance for this year is that we have a good strategy and also that our bargaining team works together. I see the main issues being pay, benefits and pensions.

Mike Ghafari • Animal Technician, Irvine

I want to help create better working situations and conditions for UC employees. We all deserve respect no matter what your background, age, and physical condition. My experience of my work not accommodating – and actually aggravating – my health problems motivates me. The union helped work out my current manageable work assignment.

Mercedes Garcia-Mohr • Social Worker, San Diego

I have a passion as a social worker to be the best advocate for my clients. Being on the bargaining team challenges me to put this passion to use on behalf of the thousands of union members that we represent. I hope to support the efforts of techs and researchers along with the health care issues that we have in common. I believe that it’s a priority to achieve market wages, implementation of health and safety standards, affordable health care, and a pension that reflects the loyalty and years of service of UC employees.

Victor Dorsett • Research Associate, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

For me pay equity and good benefits are important.

Mercedes Garcia-Mohr

I am also concerned about safety, sick leave and job security. This will be a learning process for me and I hope I can apply it to future endeavors in UPTE.

Zak Stelly-Riggs • Scene Technician, Davis

The union helped understand the way my job works. The contract is written as if all employees have a regular schedule. What happens if you don’t, like myself? There are so many holes in the contract for people who don’t have a regular schedule. I felt that the only way things would change is if I got involved and helped to try and change them.
Dieksau Reed • Computer Operator, Santa Cruz
I volunteered my time and services as a bargainer so that all TX/RX employees at UCSC would have local representation and a voice in the sessions. My priorities and those at my campus are across-the-board cost-of-living wage increases, greater shift differentials, and removing the health care waiver that allows UC to change our benefits and their costs in the middle of a contract.

Juliana Emert • Animal Technician, San Diego
I want to play my part in making UC a better job environment to work in. I would like to achieve market pay for the employees, and in this way, help keep UC a desirable employer. The biggest issue for me would be health and safety, because as an animal tech I work a very hazardous job. UC’s health and safety standards just are not up to par when it comes to the situations that its employees are put in. I’m also very concerned about the questions I get from my co-workers about benefits, wages, and health and safety.

Rita Kern • Staff Research Associate, Los Angeles
As an alternate bargainer, I want to make sure that UCLA employees have a voice in the negotiations. As a member of UPTE’s Diversity and Women’s committee, I also want to look at our contracts for potential language improvement for the two-thirds of UC employees who are female. My priorities are keeping wages growing so the health care waiver that allows UC to change our benefits and their costs in the middle of a contract.

Edgardo Vasquez • Animal Technician, Davis
I want to accomplish better working conditions in the workplace. In particular I am concerned about health and safety issues, and reasonable accommodation, in addition to the main issues of pensions, benefits and pay.

Paul Haller • Laboratory Assistant IV, Berkeley
I decided to run for bargainer because as a twenty-three-year employee, I have watched as our most important commodity, our workers, were minimized. I watched as one full-time person left and two part-time workers replaced them, and as our lowest-paid workers were offered 2% salary increases, while the top execs at UC got 35% raises. I got tired of watching. I got motivated to make a change. The most important issue in my opinion is the health care waiver and our pensions. The unions fought back when UC said “trust us” and wanted to raise our retirement contributions. Many of us are CAP and CAP 2 recipients and we were offered this in exchange for raises, when there was no money for raises. It’s funded through our pension. If I increase my contributions, I am funding my own raise I was to receive through my retirement. The health benefits waiver allows UC to make any changes it wants to our health care plans – even take away health care for its workers if they wish. We need the right to bargain these changes. Lastly, I just concluded bargaining with UC Office of the President for a new job title. My team was fantastic, and comprised of all UPTE members. Not professional bargainers, just members, who wanted to make a difference. We got everything we wanted and more. It showed me that by being well prepared, tenacious, and working together, UPTE can make a huge difference.

Victoria Barberini • Environmental Health and Safety Technician, San Francisco
I am committed to ensuring a more diverse team. I am a steward and would like to see many changes so I can better represent our members. Personally, health and safety and reasonable accommodation are priorities.

Edgardo Vasquez

MAJOR ISSUES ON THE TABLE

WAGES • cost-of-living increases that keep up with inflation • longevity step increases to encourage retention • equity increases for job series that lag market rates • eligibility for any incentive and awards programs

PENSIONS • remove waiver allowing UC to change employee contribution during contract • UC pays to keep fund stable • maintain and protect existing benefits

BENEFITS • no waiver allowing UC to unilaterally increase benefits costs • maintain quality health care benefits • support health care reforms (such as Single Payer) that promote quality care

HEALTH & SAFETY • identify and have additional compensation for hazardous work • contract language that forces UC to follow federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies

ACCOMMODATION • ensure injured employees receive adequate accommodation • programs to support injured or ill workers

OTHER ISSUES • parking rates • performance evaluations • leave for union business

Contact your bargaining team

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