UC fairly holding tech and researcher raises hostage to state budget

UPTE-CWA bargainers offered to extend the technical (TX) and researcher (RX) contracts, if UC would agree to not condition wage increases on the state budget. The fact that the budget is deep in the red has very little to do with UC’s ability to fund raises for TX and RX members.

“There’s no reason to link our wages to the state budget, when more than 90% of TX and RX employees are paid by grants, recharges or UC enterprises that all have money for raises,” said Jelger Spreuer, UPTE’s president and a research scientist at UCSF.

“Less than 10% of UC techs and researchers depend on the state funds currently being negotiated in Sacramento,” he added.

Despite additional pressure from union-friendly state legislators, AFSCME bargaining teams, UC turned down UPTE’s proposal. UPTE subsequently allowed the TX and RX contracts to expire. UPTE’s team is busy preparing a wage proposal with cost-of-living increases, step increases and equity increases for job titles lagging market rates. Union members from nearly every campus have made presentations on how their pay compares to market rates, including scene techs from the world-class UC theaters, computer resource specialists from UCSD libraries and other departments, and staff research associates from many campuses.

Historic first meeting at UC Merced

Most recently, UPTE and UC met at Merced July 9-11. As the first bargaining session to take place at the newest UC campus, it was historic, said chief negotiator Kevin Rooney, an EH&S tech at UCSF.

A significant turnout of members addressed the teams with concerns about recruitment and retention, low compensation, maintaining good quality benefits, improving drug formularies, and the need for fair market wages. Although this session was held on campus, it was tarnished by the UPTE team being forced to move six times during an eight-hour day. “The team feels that this was deliberately orchestrated to hinder our ability to bargain at our newest UPTE local,” said Rooney.

Merced local president Brad Neily, a student affairs officer, expressed his feelings that two years’ worth of positive, constructive labor-management relations had been undermined by UC’s unprofessional treatment of the UPTE bargaining team.

UC also continues to insist on having the right to increase our health benefits and pension costs after the contract has been signed. “Our members have unequivocally stated that when they vote on a contract, they want to know the total compensation for the entire contract, including contributions we will make for our benefits,” said Rooney.

Members are encouraged to observe any or all bargaining sessions. The next sessions scheduled are in San Francisco on August 6-8, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory on September 9-12, and Santa Cruz on September 17-19. For details, check with your local or <www.upte.org>.

Action to support UPTE’s bargainers

At campuses around the state, UC will begin public actions to protest UC’s inadequate wage, benefits and other contract proposals. “Public pressure on UC for its lack of commitment to wages and benefits will provide critical support for our team at the table,” said Tanya Smith, an editor at UCB who serves as UPTE’s mobilizing coordinator.

In San Diego, a “UC fat cat” (photo at right) answered questions from more than 50 members who had come to attend a bargaining session that UC didn’t show up at. One member asked the fat cat why there was plenty of money for executive pay increases and no commitment to paying staff fairly. The fat cat answered with a simple black and white sign: “How should I know? I’m just a political appointee.”

Members are encouraged to attend upcoming rallies, pickets and other events. Watch for announcement.

UC employees’ fat cat salaries rise again

UPTE has obtained information on executive pay for 2006 and 2007. The number of UC executives making over $200,000 per year has skyrocketed. Almost 400 UC executives now make more than $200,000.

DRAMATIC INCREASE IN NUMBER OF HIGHLY-PAID UC EXECUTIVES

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Salary Range</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>Increase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>over $200,000</td>
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</tr>
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<td>17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>283%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Of course, the new UC President Mark Yudof set the most blatant example of inflated executive increases. His predecessor, Robert Dynes, was paid $421,000 in total compensation, and Yudof is receiving a compensation package of $924,642. This is an increase of 120%.

The average raise for UC executives was 7.4% when the state allocation was about 4%. UC claims that it must provide these raises to attract top quality executives. The fact is that many UC techs and researchers make 20% under market rate, and that 30% of us leave every year. This should be sufficient reason to provide us with a raise, but that has not convinced the same highly-paid UC executives who seek ever more exhorbitant compensation for themselves.

At left, UC’s Fat Cat takes a break from raising executive salaries to pose for the camera.
New legislation would put workers on the UCRS pension board

Pension money for some 160,000 UC employees and retirees is held by the $48 billion University of California Retirement System (UCRS), which in recent years has suffered from deteriorating decisions and poor investment management leading to being transferred to non-UC fund managers.

That could soon change, under state legislation proposed in late June that would put UC employees on the governance board of the retirement system that controls their money.

Assembly Constitutional Amendment 5 would create a 13-member pension board jointly governed by representatives from the faculty, staff, unions, retirees and the UC regents.

“This would make the UC pension system operate similarly to other state retirement systems, including the California’s state universities and community colleges,” said Rodney Orr, UPTE’s legislative coordinator. “It’s a long-overdue reform that will bring UC workers to the table in a very meaningful way.”

Adam Keigwin, communications director for state Sen. Leland Yee (D-San Francisco), who is the principal co-author of the bill. “The right thing would have been for them to listen to the resolution.”

Long-term concerns about fund’s health

While UCRS is currently “fully funded” at more than 100 percent of its obligations, its assets have taken a dramatic downturn in the last six years, and union bargainers are worried about its future health.

Two years ago, UC tried to force employees to pay into the plan, but were met with a successful union coalition campaign to reform the system.

Among the concerns are instances of conflict of interest in which UCRS investment advisers had undisclosed ties to investment managers with hundreds of millions of dollars in UCRS contracts.

In 2006, UPTE and other UC unions hired a respected actuarial firm, Venuti and Associates, which issued a report critical of the UC regents’ management of the fund, finding that the regents, “did not have the benefit of projections and analyses that would constitute best practices” for the pension system.

“The UC Retirement Plan holds the unique distinction of being the only state public pension plan that doesn’t give workers a seat at the table,” Portantino told the California Chronicle in late June.

“It is unfortunate that recent news accounts of conflicts of interest by pension managers and an underperforming portfolio have plagued the system while other similar pension funds are doing quite well,” added Portantino.

“It’s time to end UC’s unilateral control over pension decisions, and for workers to have a voice in their future,” said Orr, adding that under joint governance, distribution of any fund surplus must be agreed upon by the employee and employer trustees. UC would not be able to pass on special benefits for executives, as it has done repeatedly in the past, without agreement from employee pension representatives.

How to contact your bargaining team

BERKELEY
DAVIS
Paul Hailer, Laboratory Assistant IV (TX), phailer.upte@gmail.com, 925-708-4671
Edgardo Vasquez, Sr. Animal Technician (TX), edgavazquez1958@scilab.berkeley.edu, 510-574-4705
Zak Kelley-Riggs, Sr. Science Technician (TX), info@upte-ova.org, 530-754-9174

IRVINE
Ling Morgan, Staff Research Associate II (RX), info@upte-ova.org, 310-443-5484
Mike Ghafari, Animal Technician (TX), info@upte-ova.org, 310-443-5484

LBNL
LOS ANGELES
Vitor Dorsett, Research Assistant (RX), vtdorsett@gmail.com, 925-296-5684
Ron Greene, Sr. Scene Technician (TX), info@upte-cwa.org, 310-443-5484

MERCED
RIVERSIDE
Bargainer still needed for this campus.

SANTOS
SANTA CRUZ
Dieskau Reed, Computer Operator (TX), dieskau3@hotmail.com, 831-840-2128

UC’s harassment of UPTE’s bargainers

UPTE-CWA members who serve on our bargaining team have added protections because of the commitment they make to be UC employees’ voice at the bargaining.

“If anything negative happens to them at the workplace, we make the presumption that it is retaliation for their participation on the bargaining team,” said Jelger Kalmijn, UPTE’s president and a staff research associate at UCSD.

Kalmijn says a comprehensive unfair labor practice charge, which will be filed with the state Public Employment Relations Board, is being prepared to protect several UPTE bargainers who have come under undue pressure at work.

UPTE’s team has had to spend precious time at the bargaining table to address these issues. “The team should be able to focus on the raises and benefits our members desperately need,” said Kalmijn, “rather than have to worry about defending themselves.”

What can you do? Keep yourself informed about bargaining and come out to support your rank-and-file representatives at campus demonstrations, bargaining sessions and other events. You can also email or phone your local bargainer (see box at bottom left) with your support and encouragement.

Ling Morgan, a staff research associate at UC Irvine, who also serves on the UPTE bargaining team.