Defending quality education, health care, research

UC workers hold first-ever statewide rally

From San Diego to Sacramento, University of California workers held a first-ever statewide rally February 26 to defend quality education, research and health care. Members of UPTE were joined at rallies and on picket lines by members of the Coalition of University Employees (representing clerical workers), the University Council-American Federation of Teachers (representing lecturers and librarians), AFSCME (representing service workers), and the California Nurses Association. Students also joined the protests to support UC staff.

At UC Berkeley, some 500 employees and student supporters marched from the chancellor’s office at California Hall to Sproul Plaza for a noon rally, where they listened to speeches and to a statement of support from California Assemblymember Loni Hancock (D-Oakland). At UCSF, several hundred people listened to speeches, including one from San Francisco supervisor Tom Ammiano. At UCLA, demonstrators were joined by press from local television and newspapers, as rank-and-file members marched up to a positive reception at the chancellor’s second floor office.

Activities at other campuses ranged from a Depression-era soup line at UCSB, to illustrate how underpaid UC workers are, to a “call in” (via cell phones provided on-the-spot to rally attendees) to UCSC’s chancellor asking her to put pressure on UC to move on the comprehensive proposal that UPTE has submitted to UCOP.

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Union vote on horizon

First phase nearly completed, staff professionals look forward to union election

UC’s staff professional employees are swiftly moving closer to a chance to vote for union representation. “We are close to reaching our goal to file cards with the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB),” said Judith Magee, co-chair of the organizing campaign and a student affairs officer at UCLA. “But that’s just the first step. We need to continue to reach out to our co-workers and other staff professionals to find out what concerns them on the job and to prepare for the upcoming election.”

Concerns about the state budget and its impact on university employees are one reason employees are joining with UPTE. “Budget cuts, salary freezes, and threats of layoffs make employees fearful for their jobs and their ability to continue to do their jobs well,” said Sue Cross, a learning skills counselor at Irvine. “But when they stop to think about it, many employees come to the conclusion that joining together in a union is their best protection and the best way to ensure that we’re able to continue to provide high-quality service to UC’s students, faculty, and research community.”

“I spend time every week walking around and talking with staff professionals about their jobs and how a union could help,” said Lisa Kermish, a senior administrative analyst at Berkeley. “It’s interesting to hear the same themes come out — worries about workload, salary stagnation, unfair application of the merit pay process, retirement income, and staff shortages. These are the kinds of things we can address in contract negotiations with UC.”

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UPTE puts comprehensive settlement offer on the bargaining table

UPTE-CWA has presented UC with a comprehensive proposal for settlement of the technical (TX) and researcher (RX) contracts. The proposal covers wage increases for 2002 and 2003 and addresses all of the principal goals decided on by union members via UPTE’s bargaining survey and conference.

The proposed wage increase for 2002 would be a combination of step increases and across-the-board increases. “From Santa Cruz firefighters to San Diego lab assistants, step-based employees who were hired after April 2000 are still at the bottom of the range and make the same as new hires. We cannot accept that this would continue through October 2003 or even 2004,” says Jelger Kalmijn, UPTE’s chief bargainer and system wide president.

The proposal also includes a conversion of all “open range” job titles to a step system in the second year. And, as demanded by hundreds of UPTE members who participated in equity reviews last year, UPTE’s comprehensive proposal includes special equity increases for job titles with particularly large market inequities or high turnover rates.

For the first time in a UC contract, the proposal would allow employees to choose severance pay if laid off, instead of leaving it to UC’s discretion. Current contract language allows for severance pay, but only when the university chooses to offer it. The UC bargaining team could not provide a single case where UC has offered severance since this provision was negotiated more than 3 years ago.

When the current contract negotiations began last year, UPTE proposed a process of more cooperative and expedited negotiations. UC accepted this framework, but has since backed away from many important parts of that framework, including accounting for how state money for raises is spent, fair equity increases, and conversion of open range merit pay titles to a step-based system.

“UPTE’s comprehensive proposal puts together all the essential elements of the initial framework in a manner consistent with the current budget situation,” says Kalmijn.

Statewide rallies for a quality UC

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Named “California’s worst public employer” by a state legislative panel three years ago, UC continues to treat workers unfairly and remains unaccountable to the public. Sixty-nine unfair labor practice charges have been filed against UC with the state Public Employee Relations Board.

“Our united effort for walkouts last fall made a major impact on UC,” said UC-AFT president Kevin Roddy. Working together, the UC union coalition intends to continue joint escalation of mobilization efforts to win fair collective bargaining agreements.

UPTE’s contract for health care professionals will come up for renegotiation at the end of April 2003.

Health care employees elected by their coworkers at each campus convened in January at a “bargaining conference” at UCLA to consider which issues to “reopen” at the bargaining table.

Drawing on a survey circulated among UC health care workers, top issues included moving to a step-based pay system, strengthening the layoff and severance pay language, enhancing shift differentials, and improving professional development and education leave.

Delegates also elected a health care professionals bargaining team composed of Sue McCormick (Davis), Kerrie Schwartz (San Francisco), Cindy Yuge (Los Angeles), Gail Garcia (Chief Negotiator), Judy Lamar (Irvine), and Michele Freeman (San Diego).

Join the union

Membership in the health care unit is high – nearly two-thirds of all UC health care workers are members of the union. Still, the bargaining team set a goal of improving that number by 20%.

Becoming a member is as easy as filling out a form – the cost of being a member is exactly the same as being a “fair share” payer. Only members can vote and run in UPTE elections, and vote in contract ratifications.

If you haven’t yet joined the union, please contact your UPTE-CWA local listed on page 4.
UCLA hospitals broke, hire ‘consultants’

UCLA’s hospital system, whose recent financial performance has lagged far behind the other four UC hospitals, is allegedly almost broke and is turning to consultants to boost its money-making capacities.

UCLA Healthcare is the largest of UC’s hospitals, but it reported lower net income than its sister campuses last year, and as of Dec. 31, had only $20,000 in cash. UC Davis, the richest hospital in the system, had $183 million in cash.

UCLA Healthcare borrowed $7 million in December from the UCLA chancellor’s office to help pay bills for its two hospitals in Westwood and Santa Monica. But the hospital has now hired The Hunter Group, known for its involvement in the failed UCSF hospital privatization, at a cost of over $1.9 million to look for ways to cut costs and improve efficiency.

Consultants expected to propose huge cuts

Vice provost of UCLA’s hospital systems, Dr. Michael Karpf, told the Los Angeles Times (February 25, 2003) that the consultants would likely propose cutting 450 full-time positions over three years, as well as reducing supply costs, and making the hospital’s network of primary-care clinics more efficient.

This is on top of cuts that have already taken place. Between fiscal 2000 and 2003, UCLA’s three hospitals eliminated 434 full-time staff positions – 297 through attrition, 79 through job reassignments and 58 through layoffs.

Patient care employees are speaking out. Cindy Yuge, a clinical lab technician, says her primary concern is “having enough staff to provide the best patient care possible, because deeper cuts in line staff could injure patient care.” Darlene McGee-Reed, a clinical social worker and UPTE steward, says UCLA’s patient load has increased but staffing has remained static.

“Let’s find other ways to reduce costs without reducing much-needed patient care and administrative support staff,” added McGee-Reed. “We will be meeting with UCLA Healthcare management to help develop concrete solutions which avoid the need for layoffs.”

Employees see plenty of room for savings — starting at the top. UCLA has awarded the 16 top hospital officials bonuses totaling nearly $1.4 million in addition to their regular salaries during the last three years. Vice Provost Karpf’s base salary last year — $436,600 — was higher than his counterparts at the other four UC hospital systems.

Interested in how to do a reclass? What are your rights in case of layoff? Signing up a co-worker to the union?

Click onto UPTE’s webpage at <www.upte.org> to find resources on all these issues and more.

Staff professionals union election

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Staff professional activists and UPTE staff met on February 8 in Irvine to map out the next phase of the union organizing campaign. Plans are to continue collecting authorization cards, to file for an election with the PERB, and to then begin the “unit determination” process with UC and PERB.

Determining the “unit”

UPTE’s proposed bargaining unit of staff professionals includes student affairs officers, analysts, administrative specialists, programmers, principal and senior editors, learning skills counselors, publications coordinators, library assistant V’s and many other classifications.

Depending on the university’s position regarding UPTE’s proposed unit, the Public Employment Relations Board may hold hearings in order to determine the bargaining unit or the parties may be able to reach agreement.

Either way, that process can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months, depending on how interested UC is in having a prompt election.

After the unit is finalized, the PERB will mail ballots to eligible employees’ homes, and employees will have the opportunity to vote for UPTE to represent their interests at the bargaining table with UC.

For more information about the organizing drive for staff professionals, or to download the authorization card that calls for a union election, please see the UPTE staff professional web page at <www.upte.org/admin.html>.
Chief MSD culprits

Do you spend most of the day virtually glued to one spot, either sitting or standing? If so, you face one of the greatest risks of developing a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD). Of the five primary risk factors for this kind of injury – force, repetition, static and/or awkward postures, vibration, and direct pressure on a nerve – static posture is perhaps the biggest culprit.

When you sit or stand in the same position while performing a task, you are putting increased force on your muscles, tendons, and other tissues, which is referred to as “static loading.” You are also inhibiting circulation of blood to those tissues, which lessens the supply of oxygen and other nutrients and retards the removal of waste products. The static loading and reduced circulation both contribute to fatigue, because your tissues have no time to recover.

The longer you maintain a position, the more force is put on the tissues affected (the adjoining muscles, tendons, and joints, as well as your spine) and the more fatigued you become, making you more susceptible to injury. These risks are multiplied by doing repetitive work in a static position. Standing instead of sitting doesn’t reduce the risks if you aren’t able to move around while you work.

What are the remedies?

One is mindfulness: for example, recognizing that when using a mouse or a trackball, you don’t need to hold it while waiting for a file to open or thinking of the next thing to write. If you’re standing at a computer or a machine, move as frequently as you can. I’ve taken to doing lunges while editing in a standing position.

Another remedy is regular movement, in the form of mini-breaks, such as short walks (drink a lot of water to flush your system and force you to take rest-room breaks, and do stretches while you’re walking). Build in longer breaks by getting away for lunch or for a quick walk or two during the day, and by seeing if you can vary your tasks.

Unfortunately, not everyone doing static or repetitive work can control their work activities. These workers need special protection in the form of supervisorial recognition of the risks involved in their work and commitment to mitigate them (best accomplished by strong safety language in a union contract).

Lack of control over work and workload pressures are two of the important risk factors I didn’t mention, and these are increasing all over the university. The result is psychological stress, putting our bodies in a state of panic. Because our minds and bodies are part of the same system and not separate entities, increased psychological stress increases physiological stress. We feel rushed all the time, breathe more shallowly – which impedes proper oxygenation and causes musculoskeletal problems – stop taking necessary breaks, and become less mindful about how we are feeling and what we need to do to take care of ourselves as we break our necks to finish our work. This is a setup for disaster, and ultimately all of us suffer – the university included.

For more information, check out the “Safety Links” site at UCB’s Labor Occupational Health Program: <www.lohp.org>.

Joan Lichterman is a UC editor and occupational safety and health advocate.

UPTE meets with UC about retirement and time reduction plans

UPTE-CWA and other UC unions met with Office of the President Labor Relations representatives in late January to discuss, among other items, UC’s plans to deal with the state’s budget crisis. Of primary interest to the unions were UC’s plans for an accelerated retirement plan and voluntary reductions in time with no loss of retirement service accrual.

UC management was very clear when they stated that there are no plans underway to encourage early retirement by current employees. The Voluntary Early Retirement Incentive Program (VERIP), which was instituted in the early 90s, would be too great a drain on the UCRS funds. While not ruling out plans for a future VERIP, UCOP officials said that it was not being considered at this time.

In response to the current state budget situation, UCOP said it is working out a plan to encourage employees to voluntarily reduce their appointments for a finite period of time. This temporary reduction would not result in a loss of retirement service credit from that of the employee’s normal appointment rate. The plan would result in salary savings to departments. UCOP said that it is working on details including how such a plan would be applied to FLSA-exempt employees. The plan is not expected to be available before April 2003. ■
UPTE-CWA Membership Application

To join UPTE-CWA, fill out the top part of this form and sign in the lower right hand corner on the form below.
Mail to UPTE-CWA at 2437 Durant Ave., Suite 209, Berkeley, CA 94704.

DUES RATES

If you are covered by a collective bargaining contract (techs, researchers, health care professionals):
If you earn $30,000 or less: dues are 1.15% of gross salary to a maximum of $25 per month.
If you earn more than $30,000: dues are 1.15% of gross salary to a maximum of $35 per month.

If you are not covered by a collective bargaining contract (staff professionals or LANL employees):
Dues are 1.15% of gross salary to a maximum of $20 per month.

I hereby apply for membership in and designate UPTE-CWA as my duly chosen and authorized representative
on all matters relating to my employment and in order to promote and protect my economic welfare.

PLEASE NOTE: even though your pay stub may show a "fair share" contribution to UPTE-CWA if you are in a unit
covered by an UPTE contract, you are not a member of UPTE unless you have filled out and sent in a member application.
Being a member entitles you to participate fully in your union, including voting in elections and for contract ratifications.

NAME ____________________________
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER ____________________________

HOME ADDRESS ____________________________
EMPLOYEE NUMBER (if different than above) ____________________________

CITY/STATE/ZIP ____________________________
HOME PHONE ____________________________

CAMPUS ____________________________
WORK PHONE ____________________________

DEPARTMENT ____________________________
HOME EMAIL ____________________________

JOB TITLE ____________________________
WORK EMAIL ____________________________

NAME OF PERSON WHO ASKED ME TO JOIN (if applicable)

_______________________________________ ____________________________________
_______________________________________ ____________________________________
_______________________________________ ____________________________________
_______________________________________ ____________________________________
_______________________________________ ____________________________________

*UPTE-CWA Committee on Political Education contribution. Our ability to influence legislators has greatly benefitted
UPTE. The money we use to support labor-friendly candidates comes from this contribution. We do not use our
dues money to support candidates. Fill in any fixed amount to be deducted on a monthly basis.

I authorize The Regents of the University of California to withhold monthly or cease withholding from my earnings as an employee, membership dues, initiation fees and
general assessments as indicated above.

I understand and agree to the arrangement whereby one total monthly deduction will be made by the University based upon the current rate of dues, initiation fees and
general assessments. I ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT CHANGES IN THE RATE OF DUES, INITIATION FEES AND GENERAL ASSESSMENTS MAY BE MADE AFTER
NOTICE TO THAT EFFECT IS GIVEN TO THE UNIVERSITY BY THE ORGANIZATION TO WHICH SUCH AUTHORIZED DEDUCTION AMOUNTS EITHER GREATER
THAN OR LESS THAN THOSE SHOWN ABOVE WITHOUT OBLIGATION TO INFORM ME BEFORE DOING SO OR TO SEEK ADDITIONAL AUTHORIZATION FROM
ME FOR SUCH WITHHOLDINGS.

The University will remit the amount deducted to the official designated by the organization.

This authorization shall remain in effect until revoked by me - allowing up to 30 days time to change the payroll records in order to make effective this assignment or revocation
thereof – or until another employee organization becomes my exclusive representative.

It is understood that this authorization shall become void in the event the employee organization's eligibility for payroll deduction terminates for any reason. Upon termination of
my employment with the University, this authorization will no longer be in effect.

This authorization does not include dues, initiation fees and general assessments to cover any time prior to the payroll period in which the initial deduction is made.

Payroll deductions, including those legally required and those authorized by an employee are assigned priorities. In the event there are insufficient earnings to cover all
required and authorized deductions, it is understood that deductions will be taken in the order assigned by the University and no adjustment will be made in subsequent
pay period for membership dues, initiation fees and general assessments.

EMPLOYEE SIGNATURE ____________________________
DATE ____________________________
Los Alamos workers support UC management of lab

UC’s management of the federally-funded Los Alamos National Lab (LANL) in New Mexico has come under fire recently in the press and in Congress.

Two LANL employees who were fired in November have testified before Congress that they were blocked by LANL managers in their efforts to uncover theft and fraud among employees at the lab.

The charges have threatened UC’s contract at the lab, which it has held without competition for 60 years. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, who has criticized the university’s management of the lab, will decide by the end of April whether to open the contract to bidding by other universities and corporations.

The UPTE local at LANL issued a joint press statement with the UPTE affiliates of the two other federally-funded labs under UC’s management at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL), and the Society of Professional Scientists and Engineers at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) supporting continued UC management of their labs.

Significant reforms are needed

In the press release, the three organizations acknowledge that the alleged credit card and government property fraud at Los Alamos, along with allegations of LANL management cover-up following the firing of the two investigators, have undermined confidence in the ability of the University of California to manage the laboratories. But they believe significant efforts at reform are under way both by UC and lab management.

The organizations maintain that these events have highlighted needs for reform at the laboratories that they have long advocated.

“The best way to prevent the recurrence of this kind of problem in the future is for lab management, the university, and DOE to take seriously their duty to protect, rather than persecute, laboratory employees who dare to point out wrongdoing when they see it,” said Theresa Connaughton, president of UPTE-Los Alamos.

CWA, global labor response to Iraq war

Communications Workers of America, UPTE’s parent union, has taken a strong position against a unilateral war on Iraq. In late January, CWA’s executive board issued a statement acknowledging that “while Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator, he is not an imminent threat to our country. There is no credible evidence linking Saddam Hussein to al Qaeda, nor with any imminent attack on the United States.” The statement urged the Bush administration to work with the United Nations to resolve the issues. UPTE passed a resolution against the war at its convention last October.

CWA and UPTE are in good company: the number of US unions which have come out strongly against possible war is unprecedented. The AFL-CIO executive board unanimously voted to oppose the war in late February, the first time that body has taken an anti-war stand. During the Vietnam War and other recent conflicts, most US unions either supported US policy or were silent. Now, labor worldwide is opposing plans for war, and turning up in record numbers on the streets to demonstrate that opposition.

On February 15, US unionists marched in massive protests – half a million in New York, and a quarter million in San Francisco, along with hundreds of smaller demonstrations across the nation.

Workers across Europe, Asia and the Middle East also marched for peace, sometimes in the millions, and in Britain, Italy and Australia there are plans for general strikes should a war start. In mid-February, some 200 unions on all five continents, collectively representing over 130 million members, signed a joint statement against a war in Iraq. The statement noted that any war would be fought overwhelmingly by the sons and daughters of workers, and that war plans were being used to distract from a sinking economy worldwide.


Corporate management of lab could hamper research

Connaughton points out that reforms are still needed, including strengthened enforcement of whistleblower protections and improved labor-management relations.

“UC is not a perfect employer, but the alternatives are much worse,” says Connaughton. Not only does UC provide an atmosphere of creativity, independence and scholarship to its management of the labs that would not be likely under corporate management, UC is an internationally respected research university. In addition, workers at LANL only recently won the right to organize at LANL, and that right could be seriously jeopardized with a change in contractor.
UCR activists on the watch against layoffs

Last July, UCR employees were told in departmental meetings that there would be 40 to 50 layoffs of state-funded SRAs (staff research associates). But a strong campaign by union activists against the layoffs got them reduced to only 8 partial layoffs. With the current budget troubles at UC, layoffs at UCR could again be on the upswing, so it may be useful to learn how activists have fought back and won.

UPTE immediately sent “cease and desist” letters to Labor Relations and requested information. The union then called a meeting for all SRAs – dozens showed up and organized two committees. One was to meet with the university concerning efforts to mitigate the impact of the budget on staff. The other committee organized community support and legislative pressure. Field rep Brian Floyd attended on behalf of Assemblyman Rod Pacheco to brief union members on the budget language.

UPTE activist Fran Holzer, an SRA III in Botany and Plant Science, said the fightback had many aspects. “We made and distributed ‘No layoffs at UCR’ buttons to all SRAs and to graduate students, and we contacted faculty and requested their support. Graduate students also sent letters of support to UCR’s chancellor.

This activity got the university to reduce the layoffs to 35 partial reductions of time ranging from 20% to 85%. But the local’s activists wouldn’t give up. They sent letters to legislative representatives, filed a massive group grievance in August 9, 2002, and requested meetings between SRAs from the affected departments and management.

After a series of meetings, the layoffs were reduced to 8 partial layoffs in September. Three of those reductions in time were voluntary.

UCB local mourns loss of activist

Erlinda Aquino, a much-loved laboratory assistant and union member in UC Berkeley’s Koshland Hall media facility, died on December 20 at her parents’ home in the Philippines after a three-year battle with breast cancer. She was 41.

Aquino joined the department in 1988 as a laboratory assistant for John Clark in Stanley Hall. After Koshland Hall was completed in 1990, she was asked to take charge of the weekly fly food supply for the new building. She also made up essential solutions and culture media for Koshland Hall’s thirteen laboratories.

Despite her illness and several debilitating rounds of chemotherapy, Aquino worked on and off until three months before her death. She is survived by her 11-year-old son, Michael.

Learn to be a steward

Want to learn how to help your co-workers and yourself on work-related issues at UC? Feel the need to know your rights when it comes to dealing with your boss or your department?

Come to one of UPTE’s regional stewards’ trainings, where you’ll learn the intricacies of the contracts, policies and politics which UC technical and professional employees work under daily. Any member is welcome – you need no prior knowledge or experience!

In northern California, a stewards’ training is set for April 26 at UC Berkeley, location to be arranged, from 10 am to 1:30 pm. Southern California trainings usually take place on the UCLA campus. Please contact your UPTE local for the upcoming schedule.
UCSD unions, students push for living wage

For a week in February, unions at UCSD and a student group called Students for Economic Justice turned their attention to a matter of crucial importance: getting a living wage law enacted in San Diego to help bring up the wages and benefits of the city’s poorest workers – some of whom work at UCSD.

Called “Worker Appreciation Week,” the campaign encouraged students and staff to sign petitions to the San Diego City Council in support of a living wage ordinance for all workers in the community. Dozens of cities across the nation have passed such local laws, requiring much higher minimum wages than the federal $6.50 minimum wage.

Unions involved in the weeklong campaign included UPTE-CWA, the Association of Student Employees, University Council-American Federation of Teachers, the Coalition of University Employees, and the AFSCME.

Over 12 percent of San Diego’s residents live below the poverty line. The amount needed for a “living wage” to put a family above the poverty level in San Diego is $11.64 an hour – which is more than some low-wage UC workers make.

Activists say that wages among those who work in the UC system rank 49 out of 50 compared to wages earned by workers at universities in other states. The only state university workers who earned a lower wage were in Mississippi. While UC’s raw wages appear higher than some other universities, the high cost of living in California caused UC to receive its low score.

Union members question why UC receives yearly grant and state funding, on average, of 5% increases for staff, but only passes on a fraction of that in the form of wage increases.

“UC wants students to believe that we want fees raised to make more money,” said Art Daly, who works in Media Services and is a member of UPTE. “That’s the last thing we want. We want the money that UC already has that they owe us.”

The weeklong campaign featured a film about the civil rights and labor movements. The campaign encouraged students to respect workers on campus and acknowledge what they do.

Organizers say workers are often overlooked and invisible to students on campus. They tabled near the library, offering information to passersby and encouraging community members to send candy grams to workers.