This year’s budget fight is over, and there is mixed news for higher education. California’s budget deal has restored millions to UC’s budget, as state legislators, supported by citizen activists and union members across the state, succeeded in turning back some of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s harshest cuts to higher education. UPTE-CWA members made their voices heard through a massive petition and postcard campaign to the governor over the summer. Thousands signed on to UPTE’s statement demanding Schwarzenegger reverse his proposed cuts to UC and the state and community college systems.

“Our members added their voices to a broad cross-section of the state’s residents who were extremely dismayed by the governor’s gutting of public education,” said Lisa Kermish, UPTE’s systemwide vice president. The petition pointed out that California’s future as a world leader in education, research, technology, health care, and the economy depend on adequate funding: “This must be a university for all Californians, not just the very wealthy.” Members asked the governor to restore outreach and enrollment funding, reduce the proposed tuition increases, and support measures to hold UC accountable for all taxpayer money it receives.

UPTE was joined by other unions in the campaign, including the Coalition of University Employees (representing clerical workers) and AFSCME (representing service workers), as well as the UC Students Association.

The fight for fair pay

UC admits it can afford step pay increases. But despite the best efforts of legislators and union members, Governor Schwarzenegger wouldn’t budget fair pay increases for UC employees. The budget includes no funding for cost-of-living increases in 2004-05. This, despite the state’s track record of insufficient increases for several years running, and available data showing UC jobs pay less than market rates.

The governor says he is committed to increasing UC’s budget by 3%, and 4% over next three years starting in 2005. UC claims it intends to pass that increase on to employees.

But even when the state does not fund raises, federal and private grants as well as the many money-making enterprises at UC (like the hospitals and research facilities) do have the ability to provide for employee raises. The state provides less than 25% of UC’s budget, but UC continues to use the budget as an excuse not to give employees fair pay increases.

“All UPTE-represented employees are now on the step-pay system,” notes UPTE President Jelger Kalmijn. “The cost of providing step increases for eligible employees balances out with savings from staff turnover and vacancies, so UC can definitely afford step increases for all employees who are not topped-out or on probation.”

Kalmijn added that at the bargaining table, UC has said it does have the money, but that it wants to spend it elsewhere. How can we make sure UC spends turnover and vacancy savings on step increases?

“Get active,” says Rodney Orr, mobilizing coordinator for the UPTE bargaining team. “We need to work together to demand our fair share, and that means talking with your co-workers and participating in contract support activities.”

Contact your local UPTE representative if you’d like to host an informative “Where’s the Dough?” workshop for your coworkers. For a sneak preview of the workshop, take a look at <www.upte.org/UCwage.html>.

UPTE LOCALS

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Santa Barbara:
(805) 685-3661
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(949) 833-8783
Riverside:
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UCSD union activist fights for free speech rights

Talking with fellow union members. Writing a message on a whiteboard in an employee lunch room. Not the sort of thing that would get you fired, right?

Not usually. But at UCSD, Labor Relations manager Michael Melman wants to fire UPTE President Carolan Buckmaster for just such reasons. Unlike UC’s other eight campuses, where such interaction between union reps and members is entirely routine, UCSD management appears to be afraid of people who talk to each other about their wages and working conditions.

For the past several years, UCSD management has continually harassed the leadership of UPTE and other campus unions when they try to communicate with their members. Carolan has worked at UCSD for more than ten years as a staff research associate. She currently works for the union two days per week, organizing fellow members around issues like contract bargaining and their rights on the job. All perfectly legal activities under our union contracts, and common on all UC campuses – except, apparently, UCSD.

In a letter filled with trumped-up charges, Labor Relations claims Carolan broke “regulations regarding time, place, and manner,” because she called union members at work, or stopped by their offices.

Ironically, these “time, place, manner” regulations are much like those overturned in 1964 by UC Berkeley’s historic Free Speech Movement. Then, UC伯keley refused to stop students’ free speech on campus. Now, UCSD management wants to prevent the free speech of employees.

“What are they afraid of?” asks UPTE systemwide board member Fran Holzer, who also works as a staff research associate at UCR. “Employees have a right to communicate and organize, and we’ll fight to make sure those rights are guaranteed.”

You can help. Send an email to management in support of Carolan’s and all UPTE members’ rights to communicate freely at work: <www.upte.org/UCSDchancellors.html>.
At the bargaining table

Strike@SBC

Union workers and SBC, the nation’s second-largest phone company, reached a tentative agreement just minutes before workers ended a four-day strike this spring. Communications Workers of America (UPTE’s parent union) represents 100,000 SBC employees in thirteen states.

Job security was the central issue. SBC wanted to transfer 7,000 technical and customer service jobs – some 7% of the entire SBC workforce – to India, the Philippines and other countries. The new contract includes wage increases and a guarantee of no layoffs for its duration.

SBC had cut more than 20,000 union jobs in core telephone operations over the past three years. CWA maintains that its members, whose skills and productivity helped SBC achieve profits of $8.5 billion last year, deserve the opportunity to work in the growing parts of the company as it deploys new technologies and expands into new business areas.

CWA also held the line on most increases to health benefits. SBC had claimed it had to raise benefit copays to “remain competitive” at the same time it posted record increases to out-of-pocket health care costs were unfair.

Research & tech bargaining

Wage issues on the table

Bargaining for wages and other issues is currently underway for UPTE’s technical (TX) and researcher (RX) bargaining units.

As the Update went to press, UPTE’s bargaining team had just proposed a three-year settlement that would provide step increases and cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs). With the contract about to expire on September 30, 2004, the UPTE team is making a strong effort to wrap up bargaining prior to that date.

“UC is still offering zero percent salary increases across the board for all titles in the vacation leave or leave without pay caused significant negative impact on UC employees’ overall compensation.

UCOP is now following UPTE’s advice and granting two days of paid administrative leave to non-represented employees. “We’re pleased to see that the University is taking a step in the right direction,” said Lisa Kermish, UPTE’s systemwide vice president and one of the UPTE representatives at the meeting with UCOP.

“Holidays shutdown periods have existed on many campuses for many years,” said Kermish. “With the University’s budget in such doldrums, it’s nice to see that, at least for this year, UC’s non-represented employees aren’t being asked to donate their accrued vacation leave to help UC stretch its budget.”

Administrative professionals

UPTE pressure results in two paid days of leave

This summer, UPTE representatives met with UCOP labor relations representatives to discuss UC employees’ forced use of vacation leave to cover UC campuses’ end-of-the-year holiday closure periods.

At that meeting, UPTE urged UCOP to minimize the financial pain caused to employees by the campuses’ decision to cut costs by curtailing energy usage during these periods. UPTE argued that, particularly in light of lean budget years that have resulted in small or non-existent salary increases, the required use of accrued

Professional Practice Committees (PPCs) at each campus to monitor equity negotiations and file grievances when workers are denied paid time off under the contract’s provisions for professional development. So that’s what we did.

These committees have made a good deal of headway. Here’s what’s happening campus-by-campus.

There is an active PPC committee in Irvine chaired by Angie Carrillo. Nuclear med techs who did not receive equity increases during bargaining received a special equity adjustment of 5% to 7% in April. Occupational therapists received equity increases in May of 7% to 12%. Speech pathologists also received increases of 14%. Physician assistants, who gathered market data and discovered they are making 20% below

Health care professionals

Improving HX pay, working conditions

Last fall, UPTE members ratified a new contract for health care professionals (the HX bargaining unit). But there are still many improvements to be made, both across the board and in specific job titles.

The first year’s across-the-board wage increases were insufficient for health care professionals. Clinical social workers in San Francisco want to close the wage gap that exists with similar city-paid employees, who work alongside them. Among clinical lab technologists, low pay means vacant positions, which in turn means greater burdens on those who remain.

Getting paid time off has been an obstacle in many UC health facilities. But health care workers have come up with a plan that is simple and, they hope, effective. “It is to enforce the contract,” notes Wendy Mullen, a clinical social worker at UCLA and UPTE’s systemwide secretary. “The HX contract allows establishment of

Unique Irvine plan saved

UCI Labor Relations recently announced it would discontinue a portion of the Re-Employment Program (an Irvine only plan), which involves UCI continuing to pay its contribution to health premiums of laid-off employees for four months following layoff. A coalition of activists from UPTE, CNA, AFSCME and CUE met with UC representatives, and talked them out of discontinuing the plan. — Sue Cross, Irvine

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A number of do-it-yourself mapping tools are available to help you figure out why your work isn’t working, or why you or your coworkers are becoming disabled, and what to do if your department isn’t doing anything to prevent work-related injuries.

These are powerful, easy-to-use, online tools to help workers identify where they are hurting, the hazards to which they are exposed, the effects of work (or environmental) hazards on the rest of their lives – and what to do about them.

Mapping doesn’t require experts and can be a lot of fun to do – especially with coworkers and others in your union or the UC union coalition. Mapping has been used effectively throughout the world among union and environmental groups to train and empower people to change their conditions.

The most complete resource is available from Hazards [www.hazards.org/diyresearch/index.htm#bodyofevidence], an independent, nonprofit magazine regarded as an invaluable tool for unions worldwide and workers of all ages. A quick search on your desktop for “hazard maps” will take you to sites of all sorts, covering locally to regionally to globally.

Do-it-yourself health and safety

UCLA administrative professional fights Orwellian treatment

The notorious Los Angeles Police Department would have treated her better than UCLA Human Resources – that was the conclusion of union activist Retha Hope who works in UCLA’s Purchasing Department. She was summarily placed on “investigatory leave” in April.

UCLA’s personnel managers refused to provide Hope or her union representative with any reason for why she had been placed on leave, or even reveal the accusation against her. Her coworkers began distributing flyers pointing out that while both the LAPD and the U.S. Constitution guaranteed basic due process rights, UCLA apparently does not. The flyer asked UCLA employees to send emails protesting the situation to several key Human Resources staff. Within 48 hours, personnel managers had backed off, allowing Hope to return to work.

Shining a light on their behavior was all it took to get results. UCLA will still not say what evidence it had, if any, to place Hope on investigative leave. “They string people around like this all the time, as a way to make people’s lives difficult and get rid of them,” said UPTE rep Joe Biegener. Hope had been a member-organizer in the recent union campaign for UC staff professionals, and a thorn in management’s side.

Hope says the experience has only made her more committed to organizing for a voice for UC’s staff professionals. “I want to support the union more than ever because I found out that UCLA can do anything that they want to do to abuse their employees,” said Hope.

She also sees much room for improvement in UCLA’s working conditions. “Management refuses to listen to or support their employees. They abuse the Incentive Award Program by distributing the money to their friends, or on recommendations from their friends, in a secretive manner. There is also extreme racial and gender discrimination at this university that needs to be addressed,” she adds.

If you want to get involved in organizing for change at UCLA, please contact UPTE at (310) 443-5484.

IT reorganization at Santa Cruz

UCSC’s executives have responded to a projected sustained decline in state funding by centralizing several, if not most, campus functions. Of particular importance to UPTE members is the creation of a new division, under a new vice provost, which will deliver information technology (IT) services, such as help desks, workstation support, server-based services, instructional technology, enterprise systems, and computer networks and telephones.

UCSC’s IT has traditionally been delivered by individual academic and administrative divisions and this reorganization – or “transformation” as UC likes to call it – has brought great anxiety to staff and management alike.

There are several innovations, however, which give UPTE members a voice in the process, and after the first year it is clear that this is not a simple slash-and-burn downsizing. UPTE members are participat- ing in several arenas as team members of the teams that are building the new division, and as consultants to Labor Relations staff.

UPTE and Labor Relations had a series of labor/management meetings to discuss the centralization projects. In one meeting with Vice Provost Larry Merkely and a team of directors and consultants, UPTE’s IT Consolidation Committee presented a list of principles it hoped would be adopted as the recruitment, transfers, and promotions occur. It included no layoffs or demotions, no out-sourcing, no student replacement workers, and no unilateral changes in flexible work schedules.

“While the meeting could not end with the complete adoption of UPTE’s principles,” said Linda Rosewood Hooper, an UPTE activist who is a programmer/analyst at UCSC, “the general feeling was that with more discussion everyone could agree to a process that ended layoffs and reductions in time for non-managers, fair compensation if people are promoted out of represented units or into exempt positions, and a freeze on raises for everyone until the period of uncertainty is over.”

A more detailed description of the committee’s work is at <www.upte-ucsc.org/news>.

Arts in the union

Many people think of unions in connection with bargaining wages, holding meetings, or resolving workplace problems. But there is also a cultural side to unionism that includes music, literature, art, and drama. For some of us, this is what has drawn us into activism, and gives us an enjoyable way to support our unions.

This was brought home to me at the 26th Annual Great Labor Arts Exchange, held in Silver Springs, Maryland, this past June. This was the third year that a benefit was added to the Labor Arts Exchange, several labor choruses around the country came together in a “choral convergence,” including my own, the San Francisco Bay Area’s Western Heritage Rockin’ Solidarity Labor Chorus. I was among some 250 labor chorus members from places like Seattle, Washington, DC, New York City, and Raleigh, NC. Each chorus brought a song and taught the others. Authors gave presentations about newly published labor books, and artists talked about their projects. It was great fun and it gave me an overview of all the wonderful union work going on that includes people all over the country with a variety of talents. People using their talents to inspire us to keep on working for the union, to reflect on what works and what doesn’t, and to remember all those wonderful union activists who committed their lives to justice. – Linda Segars, Berkeley

Innovative Berkeley severance program eliminates layoffs

Like many other administrative units, UC Berkeley’s library system is being hit with a 6% budget cut this year. But instead of issuing layoff notices or “reorganizing” employees in order to cut costs, the Library has instituted a more progressive plan.

Called the Severance Incentive Program, or SIP, it pays up to $50,000 severance to staff who voluntarily leave their jobs. The program is wildly successful, with 24 employees participating, which means layoffs are no longer on the agenda.

“This is a program that really benefits UC employees,” said John Zupan, president of UC Berkeley’s local staff and research associate in Plant and Microbial Biology.

According to the Library’s website, SIP is “a successful partnership with the union representatives affiliated with AFSCME, UC-AFT, CUE and UPTE.” The one-time program was designed as an incentive for employees who were already considering leaving UC to voluntarily resign. SIP participants received 40% of their annual salary plus 30% of their accrued severance, and an additional 4% for each year up to 20.

Employees with more than five years of service credit at half-time or greater were eligible. But because the Library agreed with union representatives that seniority should be the guiding principle, most of the accepted participants were long-term employees close to retirement.

Elena Balashova, a long-time UPTE member and library assistant V, is taking advantage of the plan to retire early: “It’s a great idea, but the union bargaining was what ensured it would be applied fairly, using the principle of seniority.”

Funding for the program – $900,000 in total – came from the Library’s budget, not the UC retirement program.

While layoffs are no longer a concern for Library employees, with fewer people to do the work, speedup and overwork is. Union activists want to make sure that remaining employees taking on new duties are properly reclassified and compensated, and that any reorganizing happens as a collective process with staff closely involved.
Bear Pass at last

U nion activists at Berkeley are celebrating after three years of organizing for a mass transit “ecopsa.” UC Berkeley announced in July that it will offer staff and faculty a reduced-fee “Bear Pass” for use on city buses starting October 1. The pass, which will provide unlimited rides, will cost employees $20 a month—that’s much reduced due to UC’s $50-a-month subsidy.

UPTE and six other unions formed a coalition to improve alternative transportation. With support from the community, students, and faculty, the unions circulated petitions recommending changes to UC’s transit policies. They held rallies and press conferences demanding a free employee ecopass (modeled after similar programs at UCLA, UCSC, Stanford, and the city of Berkeley) to help reduce air pollution, parking, and traffic around the campus.

Last year, UC made a net profit on parking fees of $1.7 million, and next year profits are projected to be $2.3 million. These huge profits could be used to offset the cost of free transit passes that cover BART as well area buses, according to former coalition co-chair, UPTE’s Tonya Smith: “Free Bear Passes benefit everyone. An institution that ignores basics like these deserves a reputation for being stingy, backward, and downright unneighborly.” Activists will continue to push UC to “do the right thing.”

CWA delegates pass anti-war resolution

Delegates to this year’s annual convention of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) in Anaheim voted nearly unanimously on August 31 in favor of a resolution that calls upon the Bush administration to abandon its policy of preemptive war and to support US troops by bringing them home. CWA is UPTE’s national union.

The demand to bring the troops home was part of an amendment to the original resolution sponsored by five CWA local unions. CPW’s Dolores Huerta, who worked with César Chavez and co-founded the United Farm Workers, served as a regent since September 2003, when Governor Gray Davis appointed her to the remaining six months of an unfinished term.

Letters and emails asking Schwarzenegger to keep Huerta on the board poured in to the governor’s office over the last few months. Supporters of Huerta’s reappointment included the Democratic Latino Caucus, League of United Latin American Citizens, the Thomas Jefferson School of Law, the UC Berkeley School of Public Health, the Immigrant Legal Resource Center and many UC unions, including UPTE-CWA.

But in early July, Schwarzenegger instead appointed investment banker Paul Wachter and businessman Frederick Ruiz, saying they better reflected his own political views. Appointment to the 26-member Board of Regents is considered prestigious, and is often given to campaign donors.

In a letter to Schwarzenegger, Huerta said she brought a “unique voice” to UC’s ruling body. “My civil rights and labor experience provides the worker and community perspective which is essential to the regents,” Huerta wrote. The mother of 11 grown children, Huerta, now 74, has had extensive experience with California’s educational system.

But Huerta also criticized Schwarzenegger’s proposal to increase student fees 10% and cut funding to UC’s Institute of Labor and Employment. She spoke out strongly against Schwarzenegger during the recall campaign in which he ousted Davis. “We’re tired of his lies,” Huerta said, according to an October 5 story in the Los Angeles Times: “And, hey, we’re tired of his grooping.”

“Where’s the dough?” That’s a reasonable question being asked by many in the UC system in the wake of big pay increases for executives. Anyone who thought UC’s practice of raising the salaries of executives might be put in abeyance during the state’s budget crisis is in for a surprise.

Over the past several years, executives have received yearly increases that are, in many cases, more than the entire annual salary of a typical UC employee. UCSD’s recently-appointed chancellor got $98,000 more a year than his predecessor. The outgoing UCSC chancellor got an annual raise of $100,000 to become a new UCOP associate vice president. UCB’s new chancellor was hired at $300,000, up from the $315,000 his predecessor received. He’s also getting a special boost in retirement benefits, a $97,500 moving allowance and a free house.

More UC executives than ever are in the “$200,000 Club.” Three hundred and sixty-one UC executives collectively make more than $73 million per year—and that’s just base pay. It doesn’t include cars, expense accounts, and housing subsidies, which can amount to over $1 million per individual executive. Of those 361, more than a third make over $200,000. (See the actual figures at <www.upte-cwa.org/20000club.pdf>.)

Still, UC claims it can’t afford even to reinvest the salary savings made from high staff turnover into step increases for rank-and-file staff. UPTE activists on every UC campus launched a petition campaign this summer to pressure chancellors to support fair wages for technical employees and researchers who are currently at the bargaining table.

“My step increases over the next three years should amount to just over 6%,” the petition reads, “but the UC bargaining team has already refused to implement any steps, claiming there is no money for the step increases promised to technical (TX) and research (RX) unit employees. But UC will save, on average over those three years, more than 7% through staff turnover and vacancies. This is more than sufficient to fund our step increases.”

The petition asks chancellors to call on President Dynes to support fair wage demands, and to “make sure every penny designated for our raises actually ends up in our pockets.”

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In the news

New regents = business as usual

In July, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger chose not to reappoint long-time labor activist Dolores Huerta to the UC Board of Regents. Huerta, who worked with César Chavez and co-founded the United Farm Workers, served as a regent since September 2003, when Governor Gray Davis appointed her to the remaining six months of an unfinished term.

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