

BERKELEY FACULTY ASSOCIATION

May 16, 2010

Robert J. Birgeneau
Chancellor, University of CA Berkeley

Dear Chancellor Birgeneau,

On behalf of the Berkeley Faculty Association, we would like to express our deep concern about two recent developments that threaten the ability of UC Berkeley to continue to provide high-quality, accessible childcare for students, staff, and faculty.

The first is the Berkeley administration's recent decision to eliminate campus care for the infants and toddlers of low-income students. Subsidized day care is extremely important to students who are parents of young children, especially low income graduate students, especially women. Indeed, for many, it can spell the difference between continuing as a student or having to drop out. Without the campus programs, our low income students will be unable use the state subsidies they can still access to provide high quality care for their children. Eliminating it will undermine Berkeley's ability to meet its commitment to increasing or even maintaining the gender and economic diversity of its student body.

The Berkeley Faculty Association strongly opposes the elimination of this program. Responsibility for children can be a huge barrier to UC access. Indeed, it can be as much an obstacle to low income parenting students, especially female students, as low income itself. We therefore urge the administration to restore to the budget of the campus childcare programs the subsidy for the infants and toddlers of low-income students. With tuition skyrocketing and the state slashing programs for low income Californians, this is not the time for us to abandon our low income, parenting students. Rather, this is precisely when we must rise to the challenge of meeting their needs.

The second development that concerns us is the position taken by the Bain group's Operation Excellence on campus sponsored childcare programs. The report characterized campus's childcare services as being peripheral to the core mission of the university and as not being of value to university members, and suggested that the administration consider "outsourcing" the current Early Childhood Centers, which serve faculty, staff, and students, to private vendors, as a money saving option.

We strongly object to this characterization of the Early Childhood Centers and to the proposal to outsource them. These programs provide services that are just as important to parenting employees, including parenting faculty, and especially women, as to campus students. Women faculty struggled hard to get these programs established over many years and continue to need them to carry out both their parenting and their work responsibilities effectively. They will be

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central to recruiting the best young faculty in years to come, as well as to maintaining gender diversity and equity among the faculty.

The proposal to outsource the childcare centers is equally misguided. There is no factual foundation for the alleged savings the Operation Excellence report attributes to outsourcing. Childcare for infants and toddlers is where we see by far the greatest need for campus management, precisely because these services are not profitable. Private, for-profit vendors simply cannot replicate the high-quality infant and child care we currently provide our faculty, staff, and low-income students, much less replicate them at lower cost.

We recognize the difficulties of allocating University funds at a time of severe financial pressure. However, we are absolutely convinced that it is possible to find the relatively modest amount of funding that would be required to maintain infant and toddler care for faculty, staff, and low-income students. Such funding might come from many sources, including private donors, the "return-to-aid" portion of tuition, recruitment and retention funds, or assessing a small charge on individual units (as UCLA has done). These are not "peripheral" services but core to the University's mission of outreach, access, diversity, and equity. They must be maintained.

Sincerely,

Wendy Brown and Christine Rosen, Co-Chairs, Berkeley Faculty Association

cc: LeNorman Strong, Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs for Residential and Student Service Programs
Harry Le Grande, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs
Andrew J. Szeri, Dean, Graduate Division
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