

BERKELEY FACULTY ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-2021

It has been a challenging and exhausting year. We have been through bleak times as numerous crises – a pandemic, mass unemployment, racial injustice, multiple wildfires – converged and intensified each other ([TW3 #168](#)). We hope we are out of the woods, that the woods themselves will survive, and that campus will resume some sort of normalcy. We have yet to learn what changes will be permanent, in particular whether remote instruction will be continued to advance online education ([TW3 #178](#), [#188](#)).

COVID-19 descended on us in March of 2020. We had to adapt overnight. Remote instruction affected all spheres of life – family, teaching, research. For many, the summer was a time of preparation for a completely new mode of instruction, and the university ran seminars on how to use the bells and whistles of Zoom. Suddenly, teaching – the material basis of the university – took front seat in the university’s preparation for the Fall. In the summer, it was not clear whether students would be willing to enroll for a semester (that turned into a full academic year) of remote instruction. As it turned out, they not only returned in large numbers, but they were excited to be back, even under the stunted conditions of Zoom ([TW3 #170](#)). Still, the university lost revenues from dormitories, dining halls, entertainment, athletics, and, of course, had the added cost of making the transition to remote instruction. The figure of \$340 million, roughly 15% of the campus budget, was floating around during the Fall as the annual cost of COVID.

So we were expecting drastic cuts in department budgets, staff lay-offs and faculty furloughs, as had happened after the 2008 crisis ([TW# 174](#), [#181](#)). The Berkeley Faculty Association proposed progressive cuts, far more progressive in scale than that proposed by the Chancellor ([TW3 #184](#)). In the end, however, the proposed furlough was cancelled. The campus would receive some funding from the stimulus and relief packages, but most of the loss would be covered by loans. The unpopular financial reforms that would have involved the redistribution of campus funding toward disciplines that taught the most credit hours and would have hit the arts and humanities the hardest were shelved until the post-COVID era.

Last summer saw an explosion of protest against anti-Black racism following the murder of George Floyd and the killing of Breonna Taylor by police. It brought to the surface a police abolition movement which had its counterpart on campus as the *Cops off Campus* movement. This was debated within the BFA Board without a firm resolution ([TW3 #162](#), [#163](#), [#166](#), [#170](#)). But we had no hesitation in condemning the UCOP Report on policing that appeared in April and proposed to intensify policing on campus – the very antithesis of *Cops off Campus* ([TW3 #199](#)).

We were also quite adamant in opposing the administration’s tone-deaf decision over the summer to dissolve the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues (ISSI) ([TW3 #160](#), [175](#)). The dilapidated state of the building, the difficulty in finding a new director, the failure to bring in extramural funds were ruses to close down the main campus institute devoted to examining

questions of racial justice, fostering cross-disciplinary exchanges, and mentoring PhD students. The administration only reversed the closure decision after *The San Francisco Chronicle* ran an article in January on the history of the ISSI and its contributions to social justice, as well as a biography of its founding director, Troy Duster ([TW3 #185](#)). Still, the administration has not made support for the ISSI a priority but instead has set up a task force to investigate options.

Another social justice issue reared its head when the Riverside campus felt itself especially badly hit by the economic crisis generated by COVID. Indeed, the campuses where the percentage of students of color is the greatest, especially Riverside and Merced, are also the most poorly resourced in the University system. They are the campuses that have the greatest difficulty both in attracting support from donors and out-of-state student tuition dollars; they also suffer from the distribution of university funds heavily weighted toward PhD students. The “rebenching” system, which was designed to rectify unequal distribution of UCOP resources, only operates when there is a surplus funding for UC--in other words, almost never. The BFA sympathized with their cause, as we are advocates for the public university as a whole, not merely Berkeley patriots ready to sacrifice the less prestigious campuses for the good of the flagship campuses. ([TW3 #191](#)).

Ever since Chancellor Christ assumed office, she has steadfastly tried to expand the housing available to students, staff and faculty, recognizing that the shortage of accommodation is a major threat to the viability of the campus, especially as the number of students increases – itself viewed as a strategy for increasing revenue. Without available reserves, the Chancellor has had to resort to “Public-Private Partnerships” to build and service new dormitories--which, of course, makes housing more expensive. It remains to be seen who will be able to afford this new housing.

Housing availability is not simply a matter of funding, however; space is also a problem. Students and community members have articulated opposition to two proposed housing developments at People’s Park and 1921 Walnut St ([TW3 #194](#)). Moreover, the Berkeley City Council is wary of increasing the student population. Now, with the impending closure of Mills College, the Berkeley administration has its eye on the considerable land owned by Mills in nearby Oakland. But plans and negotiations are shrouded in mystery. Once again, the issue comes down to shared governance – the leadership of Mills College made the peremptory decision to close without consulting faculty or students. The BFA has supported the struggles of Mills faculty to keep their famous college open ([TW3 #189](#), [#195](#))

The BFA has a history of supporting unions on campus ([TW3 #169](#)) and this year our attention was drawn to the negotiations between AFT-UC, representing lecturers, and the University – negotiations that were fraught and finally stalled. You-tien Tsing (Geography) has led BFA support for the lecturers, organizing the presence of Senate faculty at successive bargaining sessions. The demands of lecturers’ union included more job stability, fairer compensation and wage increases ([TW3 #159](#), [#180](#), [#198](#)). Leslie Salzinger (Gender and Women’s Studies) has led BFA support for improved paid family leave for university employees who have been employed for less than a year or are part-time workers, arguing the university should use the California state model rather than the weaker federal policy ([TW3 #197](#)). She has also

campaigned for improved “care infrastructure” on campus that would include childcare that has suffered cutbacks and is still prohibitively expensive ([TW3 #200](#)). As we have seen throughout the year, COVID-19 has not only made transparent but also amplified so many inequalities in our midst.

Paul Fine (Integrative Biology), BFA Board Member, reflected on his experience as chair of CAPRA (the Senate Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation), specifically with regard to shared governance ([TW3 #201](#)). On the one hand, the present administration has regularly consulted with CAPRA and DIVCO, and on certain matters these Senate Committees have influenced decisions, such as the delay of financial reform and suspension of COVID-related furloughs. On the other hand, there is nothing *requiring* the administration to gain the consent of the Academic Senate for capital projects and other decisions that affect the distribution of resources and therefore the educational mission. Paul proposes that there be a faculty representative on the all-powerful three-person Finance Committee (composed of the Chancellor, EVCP and VC for Finance), and that decisions should require consensus. Second, Paul notes how high-level positions in the Senate have become a passport into the administration, diluting their capacity to represent an independent faculty perspective; he proposes there be a two-year moratorium on faculty serving on Senate Committees from accepting a post in the administrative structure. He ends his report by countering the administration’s obsessive focus on revenue-seeking with the promotion of the university’s public role in the communities and legislature. His concerns dovetail with the principles behind “The University We Are For” enunciated by the BFA Committee of Wendy Brown, Sharad Chari, Anne-Lise François, Amanda Goldstein, Alastair Iles and James Vernon ([TW3 #176](#)).

Over the year three long-standing Board Members have stepped down – Wendy Brown, Shannon Steen and Greg Levine. We thank them for their devotion to the BFA ever since its revival in 2009. We welcomed Alastair Iles, Cori Hayden, and Poulomi Saha as new Board Members, bringing the total number of Board Members back up to 16. Christine Rosen, Celeste Langan and Michael Burawoy stepped down from leadership positions and have been replaced by Sharad Chari who will be co-chair with Leslie Salzinger (Fall) and James Vernon (Spring). BFA has a total number of 240 members.

As ever, we would like to thank Eric Hayes and Deborah Rosenberg, our ever-reliable and wise staff – Eric kept tabs on what is happening in Sacramento while Debi looks after the publication of our newsletter and membership. Every Sunday, graduate student Tyler Leeds delivered a succinct digest of the main media stories as they concerned the University of California and Berkeley in particular. Thanks to him for his diligence over the last 4 years.

Michael Burawoy and Celeste Langan, May 25, 2021