

Opinion: Money isn't the only problem threat UC system

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Special to the Mercury News

Posted: 01/21/2010 08:00:00 PM PST

If the newly constituted legislative Joint Committee on the Master Plan of Higher Education gets administrative machinations of the University of California will ebb away, and the returning flow of governance — not money — will restore the public trust in finding a new direction to support high education. Certainly the state's economic woes have taxed creativity for stopgap measures. But they have a convenient cover for some sensibilities that augur only rising instruction cuts, declining education student fees, increasing furloughs and a swelling administrative bloat.

A pulse of the current outcry beats against the spikes in annual student fees from \$600 (1971) to \$10,302 (2010), departing far from the inflation-adjusted California per capita income trend line. In the face of the Regents have espoused stoicism in the face of an unavoidable decision. They rationalize a budget escalation and promise mitigating financial aid. These arguments do not resonate, for they seem to ignore a historical fact: When state funding rose \$2 to \$3 billion from 1995-2001, the \$1,500-\$4,000 student fees 1991-1994 should have declined. It hardly budgeted.

Indeed, the lamentation "We just don't have any money" ignores the UC Office of the President's staff, costing over \$9 million a year. Over the last decade, the UC administrator ranks have swelled to an estimated additional cost of \$800 million. The ratio of senior management to faculty has jumped 1/1 in 2009.

Yet, system president Mark Yudof scoffs at the criticism about excessive administrative growth and says "These are just words. They are not accurate. They're not overpaid. They're probably 20 percent of the averages." He disclaims his \$228,000 per year deferred compensation and his \$10,000 per month as part of his \$600,000 per year paycheck. His predecessor Dynes pocketed only \$405,000 per year.

These remarks portray an unfortunate, insensitive image, which only diminishes the campaign to confront the state's negligent support of UC.

But the preoccupation with stopgap measures and the singular hope that the returning tide of reform in higher education enterprise diverts attention from another aspect of the crisis: Californians have to select UC Regents, who represent them to oversee an \$18 billion enterprise.

Currently, the Board of Regents consists of 26 voting members: 18 governor appointed, one student and two nonvoting faculty. The 1974 amendment of Section 9, Article IX of the State Constitution vet the governor's Regent nominee through a 12 member Advisory Committee comprised of legislators and UC members. The State Senate must then approve them.

Since 2004, the governor appointed nine Regents. But the Advisory Committee never met once. never deliberated carefully and has just acquiesced with a perfunctory nod. The record suggests appointments depend more on political alliance than on any qualification to lead higher education independent mind.

If the committee on the Master Plan, headed by Ira Ruskin, chants only the worn-out mantra that will miss the opportunity to demand accounting transparency that ensures management excellence of checks and balances and restores the meaning of shared governance by advocating at least a selecting Regents. Only with this voice can California develop the political will to overcome a clear danger staring at higher education.

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