

Report of the Vice President of Legislation, UC-AFT

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Summary of Activity Since Oct. 18 2023 UC-AFT Council Meeting

Since the last council meetings, I've attended 5 UC-AFT eboard meetings, recruited and registered UC-AFT delegates to the CLF COPE meeting on Dec. 5, attended the CFT Legislative Committee meeting on Nov. 3 and participated in follow-up discussions with CFT's lobbyists about the 2024 legislative session.

I organized for a potential UC-AFT COPE meeting for Dec. 1, but Katie rightly decided that it would be best to postpone to our next official state Council meeting.

Attendance at UC Union Coalition (UCUC) meetings conflicted with my teaching schedule in Fall, so I ceded that work (which I had been doing for roughly the previous year and a half) to John Branstetter and Katie Rodger.

CFT Universities Council Participation in 2024 CFT Legislative Agenda Planning

On Nov. 3, I and Mia McIver, the CFT Universities Council President, proposed three pieces of potential legislative action for CFT to consider for the 2024 legislative session:

- An audit of library funding and staffing by UC and possibly other schools
- An audit of how UC sets health care rates
- The creation of a health care fund that could allow all unit 18 lecturers to receive health benefits, modeled on the fund for part-time faculty in the California community colleges

After consultation with Unit 17 leaders, it was decided that the audit request on library funding may be premature, or difficult to prepare and mobilize for during this phase of bargaining.

CFT's lobbyist was not convinced of the need for an audit of how UC sets health care rates, but it interested in following the issue more closely. I confess to needing to better understand this issue as well.

Katie and I met with Mia about the health care fund proposal, the vision behind which is excellent. The timing is tough, however, given the massive budget deficit facing California the next couple years. We need to discuss this more with CFT before going forward.

UC Budget

There is disagreement between the California [Legislative Analyst's Office](#) and the California [Department of Finance](#) about whether the state has a \$68 billion or \$37.9 billion budget deficit for the 2024-25 budget. The Governor's proposed budget, issued on January 10, which sets the terms of debate for the legislature, chose the latter number. If that turns out to be too optimistic, we can expect his revised budget proposal in May, 2024 and his budget proposal in January, 2025 to include billions more in cuts.

For now, [Newsom's higher education budget](#) “defers” the annual 5% general fund increase in UC funding promised in the [UC-Governor “compact”](#), along with an additional subsidy to offset the cost of increasing in-state undergrad enrollment until next year. The cost of the deferral is \$250 million, which the Governor’s office suggests the UC can “use interim financing structures or other internal borrowing” to offset until next year. The Governor also announced that it was cutting \$300 million it allocated to build the UCLA Institute for Immunology and Immunotherapy, one week after [UCLA announced it had purchased a building](#) partly using this financing.

I’m very nervous about the potential for the compact to come undone in the next year and a half, and for these proposed deferrals to simply become budget cuts that hold UC at the status quo at best. The compact requires that UC increase in-state undergraduate and graduate student enrollment— something it struggled to do last year. The indication this year is that it may meet its undergraduate student enrollment targets, but that its reduction of graduate admissions following the bargaining of substantial raises to UAW 2865 has now made it vulnerable to accusations that it is not fulfilling the compact and does not even deserve all the “deferred” funds. It doesn’t help that the UC is not particularly popular with the legislature— even though they went out of their way to kill ACA 6 in 2023 so UC could continue to subcontract to non-union firms. And the Legislative Analyst’s Office [opposes the existence of the compacts altogether](#).

In addition, the history of these kinds of budget deferrals is that they neutralize what otherwise might be opposition to cuts by making false promises. In 2023, the Governor’s budget “deferred” hundreds of millions in capital spending for UC campuses— including the Inland Rising Fund for UC Merced and Riverside, and the decarbonization of UC Berkeley— in January. By the time of the May revision, those deferrals became cuts, and the state told the UC to go find the money on the bond market. Technically he committed the state to paying the interest on those bonds, but given the constant shifting in promises it’s not hard to imagine that commitment drying up in a recession or under a new Governor.

In my opinion, the compact is inadequate— it has not kept up with inflation, it does not provide the UC with funds necessary to raise the wages of 50,000 workers represented by UAW 2865, and so it does not protect adequate staffing levels in our libraries or our classrooms. It also doesn’t help reduce the cost of tuition— something that I think should be a goal for restoring the promise of the California Master Plan. But this is simply not a message that the state legislature wants to hear.

Meanwhile, for the first time in years, the state Assembly finally had a hearing on the wealth tax that CFT has been pushing for years— set for the day that Newsom released his budget. CFT’s Lacy Barnes did an excellent job testifying in support of the bill. The hearing disrupted the Governor’s message that austerity was inevitable and necessary. But the committee chair quickly moved the bill to “suspense” without a vote. Everyone treated it as dead on arrival because the Governor has said repeatedly and reiterated this year that he would veto it. Since many Democrats don’t want to pass the legislation, they can blame the Governor without even trying to vote on the bill.