

UC enrollment is on target, but faculty hiring lags

By Tarini Mehta
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The University of California serves 67,000 more students today than it did 15 years ago. That's equal to the size of about two UC Berkeleys and amounts to an increase of 28%. This is, at least in part, a result of a concerted effort by the university to increase its population of Californian students per an agreement with the state.

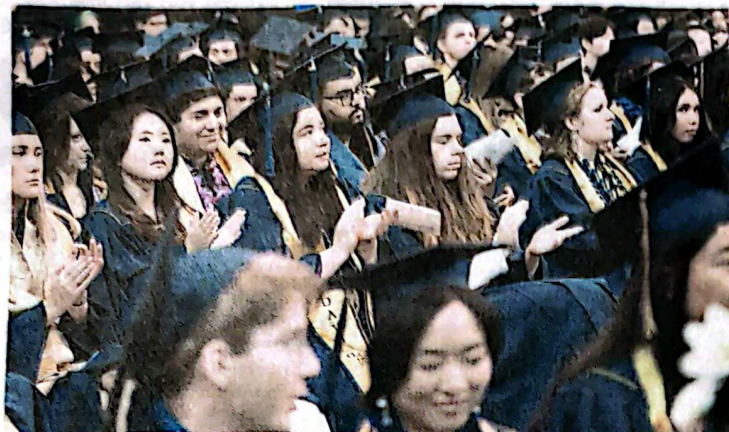
While the university is ahead of schedule in meeting those goals, it has not hired permanent faculty to teach those students at the same pace — a trend that is leaving professors increasingly concerned.

Since 2011, the UC's permanent faculty has grown from more than 9,000 to a little less than 11,000, marking a spike of less than 19%. The university had one permanent faculty member for every 26 students in 2011; in 2025, that number has increased to 28 students. Tenured and tenure-track faculty, according to the UC, are core to the university's mission of teaching, research and public service. If they are not hired in adequate numbers, the university's reputation for academic excellence could be at stake.

"Inadequate faculty hiring today will affect both the prestige of the UC and its ability to drive California's innovation economy in the decades to come," said Susannah Scott, chair of the academic senate, at a Board of Regents meeting earlier this month. "We will not maintain our leadership position for long if we do not continue to hire the best new faculty and keep them long enough for them to lean into future challenges and opportunities."

In an email to The Sacramento Bee, Scott added that permanent faculty's research leads to innovations that benefit society and a hands-on learning experience for students at the cutting edge of new knowledge. While the university works to expand access for Californian students, it must ensure research-oriented teaching is not sacrificed, she said.

The effect in the classroom is tangible. Sal Nicolazzo, an English professor and co-chair of the Davis Faculty Association, said their department is regularly under pressure to increase class sizes. Over



UC Davis graduates attend one of the university's spring commencement ceremonies at Golden 1 Center in Sacramento on June 12, 2026. HG BIGGS — THE SACRAMENTO BEE

the last couple of years, with the rise of generative artificial intelligence, Nicolazzo and their colleagues in the English department have been putting in extra hours to figure out how to teach writing and critical thinking. They have found there is an effective solution: small classes. But without enough faculty, that cannot be implemented.

"What's devastating is we can see the quality of education being eroded," Nicolazzo said. "We're here because we're really passionate about education. We need faculty to teach the students who are here. That to me is so central to the mission of the university that it's shocking that there simply aren't enough of us."

LECTURERS FILL GAPS

Although hiring of permanent faculty — those with tenure or on tenure-track — has not kept up with enrollment, the university's total faculty hiring has matched student growth nearly perfectly. Over the last 15 years, a 28% spike in student population has been accompanied by a 28% rise in total faculty. Both figures were adjusted to represent full-time equivalent student and employee numbers.

The UC's total faculty numbers include lecturers and clinical professors, in addition to tenure and tenure-track faculty. Clinical, in-residence and adjunct professors are concentrated in the health sciences. Their duties vary in their focus on research, clinical care and teaching. Lecturers are focused on instruction — not research — and hired into part-time and full-time positions on a contractual basis

With a substantial growth in UC Health — the university's 21 health professional schools and six academic health centers — clinical faculty has increased by 38% from 5,379 full-time equivalent positions in 2011 to 7,447 in 2025. This general increase occurred despite a major pandemic-induced drop in 2022 that the UC continues to monitor.

The university has also filled some holes in its permanent faculty hiring by increasing the number of lecturers on its rolls. In 2011, the UC employed lecturers equivalent to 1,700 full-time positions, that is, one lecturer for about every five permanent faculty members. Now, the UC employs lecturers equivalent to nearly 2,479 full-time positions, that is, one lecturer for about every four permanent faculty members. This marks a spike in lecturers of 45.7% over 15 years.

According to Katie Rodger, president of the union that represents UC lecturers, they are rarely hired into permanent faculty positions, meaning there is no strong pipeline between the two groups. Universities, she said, are increasingly reliant on contingent faculty to do the "lion's share of instructional time with students" but these instructors are often paid less and subject to unstable working conditions. This, Rodger said, is indicative of universities' decreasing investment in the classroom.

"We share, with the Senate faculty, concerns about growing workloads as teachers, and our students not being served as well as they should and deserve to be as their tuition costs continue to rise," Rodger said. "We, too, would

like to have better student to faculty ratios. We join their call for more investment in teaching. For us, that's at times a little bit different, but I think we share many of the same sort of goals."

Rodger's union, the University Council-American Federation of Teachers, represents more than 7,000 teaching faculty and librarians in the UC system. The union is currently in negotiations with the UC system for a new contract. The union is hoping to secure "fair workloads," enhanced job security and stronger academic freedom protections.

WHY IS PERMANENT FACULTY HIRING BEHIND?

In 2025, the UC spent two-thirds of its total annual expenses, which amounted to nearly \$60 billion, on employee salaries and benefits. In addition, the UC's core funds, when adjusted for inflation, have increased by 10% since 2000. Core funds include state funds, student tuition and fees and patent revenue, and make up about 20% of the total budget. The rest includes medical center revenue, contracts and grants, and other auxiliary enterprises.

Despite more funds and a large chunk of its budget allocated to employees, the UC system has not been able to hire permanent faculty at the same pace as it is enrolling students.

A university spokesperson attributed this lag to a notable decline during the pandemic. In 2022, the university had about 367 less permanent faculty than the previous year, both due to fewer hires and more separations.

While hiring rebounded

in 2023-2024, more faculty were leaving the UC around that time, spokesperson Stett Holbrook said. Between 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, more than 1,000 permanent faculty left the university — a higher annual rate than any year in the last decade. Permanent faculty numbers finally caught up to pre-pandemic levels in 2025.

One of the university's goals is to increase its permanent faculty numbers by 1,100 between 2018 and 2030. The university has added 676 additional permanent faculty members since 2018, leaving more than 400 for the next five years. In the 2026 accountability report, university officials said it might take longer to reach that goal if more faculty leave the UC system.

A 2024 survey of UC faculty showed that more than two-thirds of early-career faculty reported seriously considering leaving UC or academia altogether that year, an increase from 52% in 2022. Faculty's perceptions of their working conditions had shifted negatively in recent years, the survey report said. A mix of workload pressures, pandemic-related changes, resource constraints, dissatisfaction with administrative support, and concerns about institutional decline had contributed to this trend.

Recent moves by the federal government — threats to research funding, lawsuits against universities, changing policies for international students — have also made some academics across the nation choose to pursue their careers in other countries, apart from spurring a UC systemwide hiring freeze in March 2025 that significantly affected student workers.

But not every employee group's hiring and retention has been affected in the same way by the pandemic and other recent developments. The number of managers, for example, has far surpassed its pre-pandemic level.

Over the last 15 years, the number of managers — those who supervise academic and administrative departments — has increased by 64%. Senior professionals, an employee group that includes senior administrative analysts, information technology professionals, coaches and student health physicians, has more than doubled in that time. One contributing reason for that huge increase could be that the UC system reclassified several managerial and staff

roles as senior professionals about a decade ago.

Still, the overall composition of the UC workforce has undergone a change. In 2011, the UC system had over 9,000 permanent faculty and nearly 5,000 managers. Today, the university has short of 11,000 permanent faculty and 8,000 managers. Back then, 30% of the UC workforce consisted of academic employees. Today, that percentage is down to 25% when adjusted to represented full-time equivalent employees. The most marked increases among non-academic employees were of managers and senior professionals.

EFFECT ON STUDENTS

These numbers have a real impact on the student experience. Candice Phan, president of the University of California Student Association which represents student governments across the system, said she has heard from multiple students that their professors are overburdened. As a result, students have access to less support and the quality of instruction gets affected, she said.

"We're worried about resources being spread thin," Phan said. "I think the university really needs to take seriously this question about whether students are actually getting the holistic services that they need to thrive in their higher education journey."

Scott, chair of the Academic Senate, added that permanent faculty and their research expertise allows students to access cutting-edge equipment, national and international conferences, and workshops on every research topic. As a result, she said, students are able to interact with the world's leading researchers and participate directly in research — something that gets threatened when permanent faculty hiring is deprioritized.

The issue has caught the attention of the UC Board of Regents too. At their September meeting, Vice Chair Mark Robinson urged UC leadership to take action.

"We've been enlarging our footprint by students and it's always been about student count and we're never hearing about anything else," Robinson said. "We have to come up with some other metrics of how we're measuring the quality of the education that we're providing to these students."