



# Briefing

July 2009

News for UC Faculty and Staff



## Pride and Teamwork Made Obama Visit Possible

UC Merced staff worked non-stop for five weeks to bring the First Lady to campus.

UC Merced’s first four-year graduating class made national news with its successful campaign to bring First Lady Michelle Obama to campus as commencement speaker.

Less well-known is the incredible behind-the-scenes effort from employees that helped make her visit – and the resulting swell in guests – possible. Prior to Obama’s decision to speak at the ceremony, the campus planned for about 5,000 guests; more than 20,000 attended.

“We’re a small campus and staff, and we really pulled together,” said Mark Lutz, who led the team of electricians, carpenters, grounds crew and outside contractors that turned a terraced “bowl” of bare earth and weeds into a lush outdoor amphitheatre, complete with temporary access road and a ramp for disabled access.

Working seven days a week over the course of five weeks, the crew also built three temporary parking lots, a helipad and a bridge over a canal so the First Lady and UC Merced graduates would have a more direct path to the stage.

“We had to start from scratch,” said Tom Atkins, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Facilities Management, “We don’t yet have all the facilities an older, more established university would have.”

Facilities construction was not the only way Merced faculty and staff contributed to the historic commencement. In all, about 600 staff and faculty volunteered during the event, according to Sonia Johnston, Vice Chancellor of Administration, who coordinated volunteers. Volunteers worked at information booths, served as parking attendants and ushers, handed out programs and bottled water, led campus tours and more. Then they came back early Sunday and cleaned up. On Monday morning when Mark Lutz returned to work, only the chairs and the stage remained. There wasn’t a water bottle, leftover program or piece of trash to be found. Everyone from vice chancellors and their spouses to administrative assistants pitched in on the clean up.

The positive impact of the event lives on. Atkins points out that a previously unused and unsightly area of the campus is now available for student activities such as concerts, movies and small sporting events.

Even more important, he says, is the team spirit it created on campus. “It has been wonderful to see my staff come to appreciate one another and build their own team.”

The event gave Lutz and his coworkers a new sense of pride: “For such a small university, we pulled off something historically large.”

### Inside

UC People

News Briefs

President Yudof Names Benefits Task Force

And more...

# UC People

*Selected stories of UC faculty and staff accomplishments*

To read the full stories of UC People, see [atyourservice.ucop.edu/briefing](http://atyourservice.ucop.edu/briefing).

## Berkeley

### Dishing diversity at the dinner table



**Erika Rincón Whitcomb** That was some 30 years ago, the dark ages when it comes to ideas about advancing diversity in higher education. Or so one might think. But Rincón's 25-year-old daughter, Erika, can tell you that in some ways not much has changed.

As a college adviser at Richmond High School, Erika Rincón Whitcomb runs into interference from some counselors. "It's not that the kids don't want to go to college," she says. "The problem is that there's no encouragement from the many people in their lives."

This commonality of experience across generations gives the two women a lot to talk about when they sit down for dinner in their El Cerrito home. And when they leave for work in the morning, they share one more thing: They both head to Berkeley for jobs aimed at increasing diversity on campus.

Abby Rincón is director of diversity for the School of Public Health, where she recruits and advises undergraduates and graduate students from underrepresented groups.

Erika Rincón Whitcomb works for the Educational Guidance Center, part of the Center for Educational Partnerships. Assigned to Richmond High, she provides students with information on college — when to take the SATs, how to fill out applications, and, perhaps most important, that college is within reach.

## San Diego

### A Man of Noble Causes

Alonso Noble is a model representative of UC San Diego, officials said in presenting the recycling guru and longtime volunteer with a Staff Impact Award from the UCSD Staff Association.

The Impact Award recognizes an employee for outstanding contributions to UCSD's teaching, research and public service mission, or for having a positive impact on the local or global community.

Noble, an assistant superintendent in Facilities Management, has worked with the campus' Housing, Dining, Hospitality division to collect non-perishable food donations for Brother Benno's Foundation, an organization that assists the local homeless population.



**Alonso Noble**

He also volunteers with the Prison Ministry, North County Solutions for Change, a shelter for battered women and children, and the St. Thomas and Elizabeth Hospice, where he works with medical caregivers to provide support for the terminally ill.

As part of the Prison Ministry, he works at the Vista Detention Facility, organizing Bible study groups for inmates, male and female. He says volunteering there was one of the best decisions he's ever made.

"There's a lot of pain, a lot of misery, a lot of bitterness there, especially among women," he said. "I feel like I'm doing something meaningful."

# Q&A

## benefits

**Q** I recently received two mailings from UCOP, the first telling me I would soon be receiving a survey on health care and the second was the actual survey with return postage. The survey was conducted by an external firm hired by UC. My concern is the amount of money UC spent not only on the two mailings and return postage for those who completed it on paper, but also in hiring a firm to conduct the research. In these times of extreme budgetary problems for all UC campuses, I think it sends the wrong message to waste money on surveys. The money spent on the survey may be a drop in the overall budget bucket, but every little bit counts, right?

–Anon. UC Davis

**A** The University considers employee benefits – especially medical plan benefits – to be an important part of an employee’s total compensation and UC sets high standards for UC-sponsored medical plans.

To ensure that UC employees, retirees, and family members receive quality care, Human Resources surveys a portion of each medical plan’s UC membership every year. The results of the annual medical plan member satisfaction survey are published in the fall to assist UC employees and retirees with plan decisions in conjunction with Open Enrollment.

The medical plans reimburse UC for the cost of the member satisfaction survey sent to their members. In addition, if the survey results fall below a certain guaranteed threshold, the medical plans are required to pay UC a penalty for their lower performance. Both UC and the medical plans value the input and opinions expressed in the surveys and use the results to evaluate performance and make improvements in the plans.



**Q** I just received my HRB Briefing newsletter and noticed the state has not contributed any money to the UC retirement fund over the last many years, at the same time contributing billions to the state colleges and community colleges. This is totally unacceptable! What can we do about it?

–G.H., Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

**A** Yes, it is true that the state has not contributed to UCRP during the period from November, 1990, when UCRP contributions ended, through the present while contributing \$4.5 billion (through fiscal year 2008-09) to CalPERS and CalSTRS for CSU and community college faculty.

You may want to write to your state representatives about your concern. You can also join UC’s advocacy program and help the University on a variety of issues. For more information, see the UC for California website (<http://www.ucforcalifornia.org/uc4ca/home>)

# UC News Briefs

For more information about these news items, go to: [atyourservice.ucop.edu/briefing](http://atyourservice.ucop.edu/briefing).

## President Yudof Names Post-Employment Benefits Task Force

The pension and health benefits that UC offers retirees and their beneficiaries play a critical role in the University's recruitment and retention efforts and in recognizing the many contributions of its employees in serving the needs of the public. However, as UC pension and retiree health benefit costs continue to substantially increase, sustaining these retirement benefits is increasingly difficult.

To help the University develop a comprehensive, long-term approach to post-employment benefits, UC President Yudof has established a task force to study and recommend funding, policy and benefits design alternatives. In its deliberations, the Task Force is expected to consider market competitiveness, workforce behavior and development, affordability, and sustainability.

As the Task Force considers benefit alternatives and makes recommendations to the President, they will take appropriate action to observe all requirements for notice, consultation and meeting and conferring under the Higher Education Employer-Employee Relations Act (HEERA).

## California Personal Income Taxes Increase for 2009

An increase in California's personal income tax rate could mean some employees owe taxes at the end of the year.

The California Employment Development Department recently increased personal income tax rates for 2009 by one quarter of one percent (.0025).

Although the higher rate took effect in January, the state did not release its revised tax tables until recently. Because installation of the tables also requires programming changes, UC's payroll system will implement the new tax rates beginning with July 2009 earnings. That six-month delay could mean some employees have not withheld enough taxes during the first half of the year.



## Direct Deposit: Sign up today!

You can avoid a special trip to the bank or paying high check-cashing fees by having your paycheck deposited directly to your bank account. Many employees are unaware of the convenience and security that direct deposit provides. For those with a bank account, direct deposit means paychecks are electronically deposited on payday—no delays, no check-cashing fees, and no hassles.

Sign up today to:

- Avoid paycheck cashing fees
- Avoid waiting in line to cash your paycheck
- Avoid going into work to pick up your paycheck
- Avoid replacing a lost or stolen paper check
- Increase the security of your personal information

Join UC in the Go Green campaign and sign up for direct deposit and electronic pay statements today! Just complete the direct deposit enrollment form available at your location and submit it to your departmental payroll administrator or location payroll office.

## Child Turning 23?

Faculty and staff may cover their children on their UC-sponsored health and welfare plans until they reach age 23. When covered children turn age 23, UC automatically de-enrolls them, and their coverage ends at the end of the month they turn 23.

However, the child may continue coverage through COBRA. To do so, parents or the child must complete the *Notice to UC of a Qualifying Event* form (UBEN 109) and return it to your local benefits office within 60 days of the date coverage is lost. If the form is not received on time, COBRA continuation is forfeited. The form is available on UC's **At Your Service** website ([atyourservice.ucop.edu](http://atyourservice.ucop.edu)) or from your local benefits office.

Once you send the *Notice to UC*, you will receive information and forms for applying for COBRA coverage.

Under some plans, parents also have the option of continuing coverage by converting a child's health insurance to an individual plan. Most plans require that you apply for conversion within 31 days of the date coverage is lost. See your plan's Evidence of Coverage booklet for more information.

If your child is disabled (as defined in UC's rules), he/she may be able to continue coverage beyond age 23. Contact your medical plan about three months before the child's 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday to apply for continued coverage. If the medical plan carrier approves continued coverage, your disabled child may also remain enrolled in UC-sponsored dental, vision, legal, Dependent Life and AD&D coverage.

More information about COBRA coverage and eligibility rules regarding children is available on **At Your Service**.

## Have You Considered Your Supplemental Disability Insurance Waiting Period Lately?

Often new employees who enroll in Supplemental Disability choose the shortest waiting period (seven days) because they have not yet earned sick days or vacation days that might be used to offset a longer waiting period. Many continue the seven-day waiting period even though they have accrued enough sick leave to cover a longer waiting period. Under any waiting period, the first 22 working days of accrued sick leave must be used up (excluding paid holidays).

If you have enough accrued sick leave to cover a longer waiting period, you can reduce your monthly premium. The longer the waiting period, the lower the monthly premium. For example, a 35-year-old employee earning \$50,000 per year pays \$32.08 per month for supplemental disability with a seven-day waiting period and \$12.08 per month for a 30-day waiting period. Premiums are based on your age and salary.

*You can change to a longer waiting period at any time, but you can only reduce your waiting period if you submit a statement of health application. It must be approved by Liberty Mutual. Make sure you consider your options carefully before you make a change.*

Women who plan to use Supplemental Disability coverage for pregnancy disability and child birth should note that, depending on your available sick leave and whether or not your pregnancy/delivery has complications, you may not be "disabled" long enough to receive benefits unless you have a seven day or 30-day waiting period.



## Stay On Top of the Budget Situation

UC's budget situation remains extremely fluid until California lawmakers enact a state budget. Find the latest developments, including information on possible salary reductions and/or furloughs, at: <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/budget/>

## Briefing



*Human Resources and Benefits Briefing* is published by University of California Human Resources to provide news and information to UC faculty and staff. Points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent those of the University.

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