

July 1, 2010

As UC Stonewalls Contract Negotiations, Researchers Take their Fight for Fairness Online

Posted on 30 June 2010



By Steven Maviglio

The union representing 6,500 scientific researchers at the University of California today launched a new online information campaign highlighting the role of postdoctoral researchers (“postdocs”) in California’s economy, saying that after UC has stonewalled contract negotiations for 18 months, it is time to take their case to the public. A barrage of online ads in major scientific, academic, and news websites shows postdocs are critical to California’s research and innovation engine.

Noting that Ph.D.–educated scholars researching cancer cures earn as little as \$37,400 annually, while UC administrators who are holding up a fair contract earn in excess of \$165,000 each year, the ads bring into sharp focus how out of touch the administration is with the skilled scientists who do the bulk of the university’s world–renowned research and who help UC bring in \$5 billion in federal, state, and private research contracts annually. This research grant revenue has more than doubled in the last decade and may not be used for purposes other than research such as substituting for funds lost due to the state budget crisis.

A new website, www.FairnessForUCpostdocs.org details how UC President Mark Yudof’s administration has delayed negotiations, hidden behind false excuses, and even raised the ire of Congress for its refusal to bargain fairly.

"For 18 months, President Yudof's administration has stonewalled, stalled, and presented misinformation in order to prevent postdocs from securing a fair contract. The California public expects more from our university. Our online campaign will demonstrate the value of our work to California's economy and quality of life, and engage the public in our fight for fair salaries, benefits, and working conditions," said Neal Sweeney, a Postdoc at UC Santa Cruz and member of the Union's bargaining committee.

Today's campaign comes as Postdoctoral Researchers Organize/UAW, the union representing UC postdocs, and the Administration sit down today for what will be an extraordinary 58th bargaining session. Postdocs said they are prepared to escalate their information campaign in the coming weeks to ensure their value to California is not ignored by the administration.

The new campaign comes on the heels of PRO/UAW filing an Unfair Labor Practice charge on June 9th and unprecedented and growing pressure from Congressional leaders encouraging UC to reach an agreement. UC's failure to come to agreement after 15 months prompted an April 30, 2010, House Committee on Education and Labor field hearing, after which Chairman George Miller wrote UC President Yudof expressing "deep concern" about UC's slow-paced approach to the negotiations, saying he "left the hearing thoroughly disappointed" in UC's efforts to reach agreement.

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