June 1, 2017

Dear Colleagues:

I like to highlight pride. Not only does it convey my feelings about UCSF, but also because of our PRIDE values: Professionalism, Respect, Integrity, Diversity and Excellence.

Focusing on how the ?D? lives and breathes at UCSF, I take this opportunity to urge you to honor exceptional efforts of an individual or team for one of the Chancellor Awards for Diversity [1]. The deadline is June 13.

Another expression of pride is the San Francisco Pride Parade [2]. This fantastic expression of LGBTQ and ally unity, with sister events worldwide, is scheduled for Sunday, June 25. UCSF will have a contingent in the parade and will provide t-shirts to the first 300 people to register. Sign up [3]!

Moving on, this month you?ll read about:

- Scientific Literacy: Our expanding responsibility and obligation to the public
- Ebb and Flow: The cycle of working at UCSF
- Take it to the Bank: BIOS creates new system for efficient banking of biospecimens

If any of these topics inspire you, or give you an idea for another topic I haven?t covered, please drop me a line at ExecutiveViceChancellor@ucsf.edu [4]. Thanks for reading!

Sincerely,

Dan

Scientific Literacy: Our expanding responsibility and obligation to the public

The new political climate has sparked a latent desire in many people to be involved. Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, when he was President Obama?s chief of staff, famously said, ?You never want a serious crisis to go to waste [5].? It?s an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before. The great thinker Homer Simpson coined a word for it: ?Crisitunity [6].? 

At the 10th Annual Chancellor?s Leadership Forum on Diversity and Inclusion [7] we heard from Claire Brindis, director of the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies and
professor in the Department of Pediatrics, about the Stand Up for Science teach-in and rally [8] she led on April 22. With all the bad news swirling around about potential budget and program cuts as well as science deniers, scientists like Claire are reacting to the crisis and getting involved.

?The repercussions of the Trump election have made it very clear that our scientists at UCSF need to develop a number of skills to present their research to a variety of stakeholders,? says Claire, adding that as a scientific community we need to focus on ?capital ?P? policy,? shaping national legislative directions and funding decisions, and on ?small ?p? policy? as well, interpreting and implementing rules on Medicaid and health reform at the state, local and university level. We also have to acknowledge that sometimes we don?t effectively communicate the importance of our science to policy makers and to the general public.

But that doesn?t mean we need to forget our day jobs and rush headlong into policy. According to Claire, ?We can?t be policy advocates about every issue that?s out there.? But I think it?s imperative for scientists on our campus to consider: Is there one particular topic area they feel impassioned about and that they can be engaged in??

And, Claire is a perfect person to help lead this charge. Her work focuses on ameliorating the impact of social, health, and economic disparities among a wide variety of multi-ethnic and racial populations, and Stanford University Press just published her co-authored book, ?Advocacy and Policy Change Evaluation: Theory and Practice [9].? At the Stand Up For Science teach-in and rally, some of our very best researchers explained how politics occasionally created a stumbling block for their scientific efforts, from Susan Fisher?s challenges in conducting stem cell research, to the hurdles Jim Kahn overcame in establishing needle exchange policy and funding. The online video [10] offers some advocacy tips, along with some of the following suggestions offered by Claire:

- **Draw on the lessons of the past.** AIDS activists were able to have an impact through forceful protest and effective networking.
- **High profile cases can spur action.** When President John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy?s premature baby died as a result of respiratory distress, it led to a significant increase in research funding devoted to preventing premature births.
- **Use ?social math [11].** An insurance company translated the large number of deaths experienced by young drivers on an annual basis to its equivalent in plane crashes. Translating a large number into a unit that people can relate to will lead to a more tangible understanding of a problem?s seriousness and its impact.

In regard to our students, I agree with Claire that as educators and mentors the onus and responsibility about scientific literacy falls on our shoulders. Claire has high praise for UCSF?s Graduate Division, which has launched the Advocacy 101 series. Its Advocating for Science and Scientists [12] webpage is chock-full of great information about those events and other resources. Elizabeth Silva, associate dean of Graduate Programs, has a background in policy and is coordinating much of the activity. They?ve hosted an event each month, beginning in March with Science Advocacy 101 [13]. After the April teach-in, UCSF hosted a lecture on Dealing With Science Denial [14] by Dr. Ann Reid, executive director of the National Center for Science Education.

The Graduate Division also teemed up with University Relations to run ?Twitter for Science?, a crash course in how scientists can use social media to spread the word about their work.
You can watch it on YouTube. Liz gets frustrated when people say scientists shouldn’t be advocates, “That’s a privilege a subset of us have had.” But many scientists have had to deal with bias, prejudice and racism, she says, and “a lot of people had to advocate just to be at the table and be a scientist.”

Andrew Bindman, MD, professor of Medicine and Epidemiology & Biostatistics and former director of the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, also spoke at the April 27 diversity forum. Responding to a question from the audience, he said, “We need to revisit the education we are offering in this country to make sure that people understand democracy, how to be involved, and the importance of science in that process.” I’ll close with a quote by Franklin D. Roosevelt: “Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.”

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Ebb and Flow: The cycle of working at UCSF

It’s not your imagination: In June, as our graduates leave UCSF, many of our faculty and staff depart as well.

Over the last three years, according to Pamela Hayes, the benefits manager for UCSF Campus Human Resources, approximately 275 to 325 employees retired each year from the UCSF campus, and on average 54 percent of the retirements were at the end of June. That means there are lots of planning involved to fill the big shoes of those individuals about to walk out the door? that’s a lot of institutional memory.

And here’s something I just learned about this subject from Andrew Parker, a clinical psychologist and manager with UCSF’s Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (FSAP): Retirement can be as stressful as the loss of a loved one. “It helps to think of retirement not as an event but a process that unfolds over time,” Andrew says. “A person may think about it for a long time, then set a date, go through some transition sessions, but still get a shock when the day actually comes. Or they could go through a honeymoon phase when they get to sleep in and enjoy their newfound freedom, only to find the novelty wears off, and they wonder, ‘What now??’

“The biggest problem for a lot of people, especially our faculty, is a change of identity,” Andrew says. “For a large number of our extremely hard-working faculty, their life and identity are tied up in their work. They get a sense of feeling productive, achieving things and status. It can be a great help to talk these issues through, both before and after retirement, Andrew says. FSAP offers confidential consultations, so you can even talk to an FSAP counselor before you talk to your department chair without worrying about word leaking out prematurely. Some retirees can maintain access to FSAP after they retire, if they keep their health plan through COBRA, or if they come back on a recall or some other arrangement.

If you’re daydreaming about or pondering the thought of retiring, definitely check out the benefits office. It helps prepare employees for this transition, putting on a workshop series every March that includes classes on the UC retirement plan, steps you need to take before retiring, a class on financial readiness, a class on retiree health care and Medicare, and a class that addresses the emotional aspects of transitioning to retirement. The workshop series
also addresses what it means to be an emeritus professor, and how it works if a retiree wants to come back on recall, in which a faculty member returns to work but is limited to 43 percent time. And, once you are retired, there are also groups you should consider joining, i.e., the UCSF Emeriti Faculty Association [19] and the UCSF Retirees Association [20].

I mentioned above the loss of institutional memory, but there’s an upside too?new faces and perspectives for our UCSF community! That’s the ebb and flow of an institution like ours?we are the second-largest employer in San Francisco, behind only the City and County of San Francisco, and it’s the fourth-largest in the Bay Area.

Navigating UCSF can be challenging as a new employee. Human Resources greatly improved the onboarding process about a year ago in terms of acclimating new faculty and staff to the complexities of UCSF as well as providing base information that they want and need to know,? says David Odato, UCSF’s associate vice chancellor, Human Resources. Sometimes it’s sharing the real simple stuff?how they get paid, how the shuttle system works, what benefits come with their job, which campuses have what amenities?that makes new colleagues feel included. Onboarding happens three times a week for new faculty and staff, and as Pamela says, “It’s a nice way for new employees to meet each other and network, since they’re all coming in at the same time.” In addition, there is an annual Faculty Development Day [21] each September, sponsored by the Campus Counsel on Faculty Life, which includes plenary sessions, workshops, and informational resources that are relevant to faculty at all career stages.

To those of us remaining at UCSF, we will encounter new names and faces as well as new ways of doing things. Thankfully, ours is not a static community, and this is a fantastic time to put out the welcome mat, demonstrate our PRIDE values, and show that it is great people that make UCSF a great place!

To those retiring, I send my heartfelt appreciation and congratulations for your commitment and contributions. You are entering a new phase of your life, and I wish you contentment, peace and the chance to explore entirely new facets of being alive.

Take it to the Bank: BIOS creates new system for efficient banking of biospecimens

UCSF has more than 150 independent biobanks that are not presently coordinated or connected, and if you’re a faculty member engaged in research, you have probably known for some time that we could do a better job. Yet the trick has been improving the system without breaking the things that work, namely ensuring that researchers maintain control over the biospecimens they need. We’re on our way. The Biospecimen Resources Program (BIOS) has put new systems in place, akin to banking, that are already showing effectiveness, and more are on the near horizon.

Most people were not entirely happy with what they had,? says Associate Vice Chancellor of Clinical and Translational Research Jenny Grandis in describing what was in place. “It either cost too much or was too cumbersome or they didn’t have the storage space in their freezer.
We haven’t really found one group at UCSF that didn’t identify gaps in their tissue banking enterprise. We are hopeful that this represents a real opportunity to help.

BIOS is a one-stop shop for researchers who need help with biospecimens, providing services and tools to make acquiring, processing, storing, annotating and managing them more efficient, cost-effective, and less time-consuming, as well as compliant with applicable regulations. The program, led by Director Scott VandenBerg, has put a specialized team in place to acquire biospecimens. The leader of this team is Tasha Lea, a certified pathologist assistant who works closely with operating rooms and the diagnostic pathology teams to make sure biospecimens are properly collected, annotated, and distributed.

Consider a tumor. In the old system, Tasha says, a tumor would be removed from a patient, and five research groups might want the sample. The patient would get multiple calls and have to sign several consent forms. And if the tumor was carved up, the treating clinician might not have all the crucial information, such as the original size of the intact tumor specimen.

Now, Tasha and her team are the “honest broker” for the research groups. They retrieve the specimen from the operating room, make sure all the information the clinician would need is recorded, and coordinate the distribution of material to researchers. Scott calls the team the ultimate matchmaker. We want to make it as easy as possible for researchers to get tissue and not overburden the patient or the clinical teams with multiple overlapping requests? Tasha says. Most importantly, the acquisition of research biospecimens will never interfere with the clinical care that is provided to our patients, who give us the privilege of collecting their specimens for research.

BIOS has signed up multiple disease groups to use the service already, including gynecologic oncology, head and neck cancer, breast oncologic surgery, adult soft tissue and bone, colorectal surgery, GU oncologic surgery, pancreas and liver diseases. It’s moving. It’s progressing, Scott says, with notable excitement. I wouldn’t have guessed we’d have these disease teams in place in the first year. Also, a pilot project kicking off this month will implement a process in which leftover clinical biological samples will be banked for research. Improved software ensures better annotation, tracking and management of specimens.

Maybe the BIOS program would work for your group? get in touch with the team to check it out.

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Dan’s Tip of the Month
If you can find a spare 23 minutes in your day, please watch the commencement address on UCSF.edu [24] given by former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy to this year’s School of Medicine graduates (scroll to the bottom). It was quietly magnificent! The written story highlights its content, but witnessing Dr. Murthy’s compelling delivery is truly poignant in reminding us all that principles are only worth having if you have the courage to act on them, and that our journey ends only when wisdom prevails over ignorance, hope transcends cynicism, and love triumphs over fear. This is one for the ages?

Photo: Elisabeth Fall

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Links
[1] https://diversity.ucsf.edu/community/awards
[4] mailto:ExecutiveViceChancellor@ucsf.edu
[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pb-YuhFWCr4