

**AAC Meeting Minutes**  
**Academic Assembly Council Meeting - April 30 and May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025**

Location: Davis, CA

**Present:** Chris Greer, Nick Clark, Andy Lyons, Daniela Bruno, Julie Finzel, Ben Faber, Whitney Brim-DeForest, Annemiek Schilder, Kristen Shive, Ashraf El-Kereamy and Rubia Branco-Lopes

**Zoom:** Mark Bolda during Daniel Obrist update

**Day 1:**

**President** (Chris Greer): proposed creation UC ANR Early Career Academic Special Committee

**Committees' updates:**

**WELFARE & BENEFITS** (Ben Faber, Whitney Brim-DeForest): proposed webinars: (1) how to do consulting and policies changes on that and (2) on sabbatical. They shared results from exit survey provided by Tina Jordan, which focused on employees who have either retired or resigned from UC ANR. The top three reasons cited for leaving were: i) dissatisfaction with compensation, ii) inadequate health insurance options, and iii) challenges related to housing.

**RULES & ELECTIONS** (Julie Finzel): a survey will soon be distributed to identify those interested in serving on the AAC. The same survey will also facilitate the election for the next AAC President (elect). At present, there are 3 vacant positions on the council that need to be filled. In addition to the three currently vacant positions, there will be up to 11 vacancies needing to be filled as of June 30, including President-elect.

**MULTIPLE ACADEMIC TITLES REPRESENTATIVE** (Annemiek Schilder): need to obtain an up-to-date list of academics with titles not currently captured in existing distribution lists. Communication remains a challenge, and their departure from UC is often only noticed when their email accounts become inactive.

**PROGRAM COMMITTEE** (Daniela Bruno): the awards for the April–June 2025 funding cycle have been finalized, and recipients have been notified. All awardees have already received their corresponding accounts.

**ACADEMIC COORDINATOR REPRESENTATIVE** (Andy Lyons): they are preparing a survey to send out to all ACs. The main areas include: i) AC needs for onboarding/orientation, ii) access to and use of professional development funds, iii) impacts on professional development and career choices from soft-funded positions, and iv) details of their position description.

Given the growing ranks of ACs (which they believe currently to be 45), the committee is developing a curriculum for AC orientation, building upon the onboarding training for ACs implemented by SAREP in January 2025. Current plans are to pilot test the curriculum this fall as an online training.

They continue to work on obtaining access to an up-to-date authoritative list of ACs, so that they can forward announcements to ACs who are not on the official AC email list in the portal. Their current efforts focus on leveraging a data layer derived from the ANR Footprint.

The committee expressed interest in the results of ANR's internal review of AC compensation currently in progress and will contact Bethanie Brown to seek updates and offer assistance.

**ADVISOR REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE** (Nick Clark): Based on the survey results the top 3 concerns reported were dissatisfaction with compensation, lack of access to adequate health insurance, and difficulty securing affordable housing. Discussion about health insurance, focusing on UC's role in plan offerings versus structural limitations of the healthcare system.

**UC ANR Business Operations:** Maru Fernandez, Interim Director, Statewide Programs and REC Operations (SWPR):

- She provided an overview of SWPR. It supports budgeting, grants, purchasing, and hiring for ANR leadership, CE specialists (outside UCD, UCR, UCB), statewide programs, and RECs. It also manages travel funds, internal grants, and major awards (LFFI and the Southwest Food Hub).
- She acknowledged the challenges with implementing Aggie Enterprise, and informed that new Aggie Enterprise reports will be implemented soon.
- Reminded that sponsor invoice requests should be directed to the BOC/SWPR

Su-Lin Shum, Director, BOC

- Provided an overview of BOC.
- Provided information on the card machine, which allows units to rent credit card machines for short-term use during sales and events. There is a \$10 daily rental fee, in addition to shipping and transaction costs. Machines are shipped based on availability. To use it people must complete the required security training. A discussion followed regarding the possibility of placing machines permanently in county offices with high volume of visitors with interest in purchasing items. Su-Lin noted that while such arrangements could be considered if a strong need is demonstrated, the program is designed for temporary use. As an alternative, offices could use the survey tools to collect credit card payments.
- Tax form: tax determined based on the location where the product is received.
- Reminded about BOC training for new employees and BOC office hours

**UC ANR Academic Human Resources:** Tina Jordan, Director, Academic HR

- A review of Academic Coordinators is currently underway.
- A UC hiring freeze is in effect. Exceptions apply to: i) positions approved through the position management process prior to April 1, 2025, ii) positions approved as part of the

2023–2024 academic position call, iii) positions fully funded by contracts or grants, iv) mission-critical positions (subject to additional approvals)

- Rising health insurance and housing costs were discussed.
- The Mortgage Origination Program (MOP) was discussed. Uncertainty about its benefits were expressed by members of AAC.
- AAC requested to review the results of the salary competitiveness survey for advisors. Tina noted that she did not have the details.

**UC ANR Office of Contracts and Grants:** Kimberly Lamar, Interim Director, OCG

- Reported minimal disruption to federal awards under current administration policies, with 18 terminations or pause/stop-work notices issued, six of which have resumed.
- New academics receive welcome letters introducing OCG services, including Proposal Development.
- OCG is working with the BOC and SWPR to improve the escalation process for delays in account setup and invoicing. Monthly meetings with UC Davis Contracts and Grants Accounting continue to address process issues.
- OCG also plays a role in the UC ANR Strategic Framework as co-goal owner for Goal #11: Improve Post-Award Grants Management. This includes reviewing current processes and supporting training development.
- Requests should be also sent to the general OCG email.
- Clarification on OCG post-award role: responsible for subcontracts and amends.

**UC ANR Information Technology:** Jaki Hsieh Wojan, Deputy Chief Information Officer and Chief Information Security Officer

- UC ANR is moving towards hosting all resources independently. UC ANR will be hosting its own email in the next couple of years, completely separate from UCD. UCD email addresses can be forwarded to UC ANR emails.
- Their strategic goal is to provide volunteers with UC ANR volunteer email accounts.
- Collaborative and survey tools are both being reviewed for potential replacements. Survey and volunteer management systems are the highest priority.
- Also, there are plans to establish a single network (housed in cloud and physically) which would provide centralized access to all UC ANR files.
- Blogs moved to IWP. Active blogs have been migrated (under “Group”). Those interested in creating a new blog or site should submit a request.

**UC ANR Staff Human Resources:** Bethanie Brown, Executive Director, HR

- Internal review of academic coordinators
- Survey on onboarding training
- AAC requested to review the results of the salary competitiveness survey for advisors. Bethanie explained that the firm hired for the study was provided with a comprehensive explanation of the advisor role beyond the job description, recognizing

that similar positions in other states may not be directly comparable. The firm accounted for these differences in its analysis, although she did not disclose the specific methodology for it. She noted that the data is the company's proprietary information and therefore cannot be shared directly with advisors. Bethanie also mentioned that hiring an external firm was necessary because UC ANR HR does not have access to detailed compensation data from other universities. In contrast, the salary review for Academic Coordinators is being conducted internally.

#### **UC ANR Vice President: Glenda Humiston**

- Program Team restructuring with the hope that this system will be in place on July 1 st, 2025. The idea is to reconnect advisors with specialists.
- Explained the new Policy Institute and how the goal is to make it a place for policymakers to find and access scientists and research on issues critical to California.
- UC ANR's funding is diversified, with approximately 44% coming from the State of California. Federal funds contribute less than 10%, similar to county support, while grants account for about 28%. The remaining budget is covered by other sources.
- AAC informed that when an advisor is approved to relocate to a newly opened position in another county, the new post is filled, but the advisor's former county is left vacant, and it may go unfilled for an extended period.

#### **Day 2:**

#### **President: AAC by-laws review postponed to next meeting**

#### **President and committees' representatives: - discussion and approval of UC ANR Early Career Academic Special Committee:**

This committee will include advisors and specialists who have been with UC ANR for fewer than six years. Senior advisors and specialists will serve in an ex-officio capacity to provide guidance and support. The committee will have a chair and seven members, who may be elected or appointed, with members serving one-year terms.

#### **UC ANR Academic Personnel and Development: Daniel Obrist, Vice Provost**

- Discussed UC hiring freeze (details previously described).
- Status of 2023/24 CE positions releases:
  - o 12 (of 29) CE Advisor positions in recruitment/hired
  - o 5 (of 20) CE Specialist positions in recruitment
  - o UCD/UCM/UCR positions on hold until campus MOUs are completed
  - o Re-started in-person finalist interviews
- Academic Footprint as 01/31/25:
  - o CE Advisors: 187
  - o CE specialists: 109

- Academic Coordinators: 44
  - Other ANR Academics: 28
- Academic Advancement Program Reviews: 2024/25 status
  - Program reviews: 88
  - Annual Evaluation: 164
  - PRC preliminary meetings: 02/15/2025
  - PRC Convening meetings: 03/ 3-7/2025
  - Final AVP Decision Process: Ongoing
  - Academic HR: sends AVP decisions to academics/supervisors: end of May/ beginning of June
- Academic Advancement 2025/26 process:
  - Expect some changes
  - Debrief Discussion with PRC and AAC Personnel Committee. June: contact your AAC PC reps for input
  - Contributions AA and DEI: awaiting USDA NIFA feedback. It is expected that federal and state reporting will differ, with state DEI reporting remaining under current guidelines.
  - Consider adding a statement of special circumstances for federal funding challenges
  - New 2040 vision: for the upcoming reporting period, continue the use of the current Public Value/Condition Change framework, it will be communicated when things change
- In addition to the mentorship program, Daniel submitted a budget request for a new program pairing new academics with senior colleagues in their region.
- AAC commented that County Directors should conduct needs assessments to better understand advisors and staff needs; Daniel clarified that this is already a requirement.
- 2019 orientation guide is being updated.
- Learning and Development webpage will be reorganized to improve content structure and usability.

### **UC ANR Workplace Inclusion & Belonging:** Elizabeth Moon, Director, Workplace Inclusion & Belonging

- Provided an overview of her role. She helps operationalize the Principles of Community and address equity, diversity, and inclusion issues systemwide.
- Discussion about how being an advisor from a minority group can impact retention, particularly in very rural areas where advisors may feel isolated or lack support networks.
- Discussion about enhancing team building within counties and statewide. A common challenge raised was the difficulty in charging team-building expenses under current policies.
- She mentioned the refreshed Principles of Community (communication, openness, mutual respect, member investment, united in purpose, network of safety, integrity, and transparency). Posters of the Principles are available upon request.

**UC ANR Publishing:** Rachel Lee, Director, Publishing

- Presented some challenges: financial constraints (the budget was exceeded, adding pressure to operational decisions and timelines), editors and reviewers' assignment (no database of academic by expertise), long review process, not consistent review format and content among reviewers, need of sorting ANR catalog to keep relevant and updated publications
- Fastrack will be replaced by Scholastica, platform for peer-review.
- Discussion on whether one or two reviewers might be sufficient for peer-reviewed publications being updated. AAC emphasized the importance of maintaining strong peer review standards, noting that "too much" peer review may, in fact, be necessary for credibility and consistency.
- Rachel mentioned the role of the Communications Advisory Board (CAB) in the review process. Julie Finzel, CAB member, explained that the board recommends guidelines for Associate Editors, peer review standards. CAB meets quarterly and Julie noted that the issues raised during the meeting will be brought to future CAB meetings for further discussion.

**UC ANR County Cooperative Extension:** Lynn Schmitt-McQuitty, Director, County CE

- Mentioned the County Director/Area Director survey. Concern from outside the AAC was expressed about whether it is appropriate for advisors to provide feedback on their supervisors. Lynn assured that it is acceptable and valuable to gather this type of input.
- As area directors are not academics, they are evaluated through the staff process.
- Surveys cover 8 different areas
- The AAC raised concerns about communication challenges, particularly regarding important information shared with County Directors that is not always passed on to advisors. One member shared a personal example, explaining that they only became aware of a critical message because they were part of a separate collaborative platform where the information was also posted. Lynn expressed concern about the situation and noted that the use of two separate collaborative tools for communication (CD and adm).
- Discussion about the importance of comprehensive onboarding. Lynn shared that she provides a thorough onboarding process for County Directors, AAC expressed concern that some CD may not be offering the same level of support to new advisors. The AAC also raised concerns about low attendance at the latest programmatic orientation for new academics, some members suggested it should be mandatory.

**UC ANR:** Brent Hales, Associate Vice President, Research and CE

- The call for the Vice Provost of Research and Program Integration received strong applicants. The application window opened on March 6, 2025, with the first review on April 21. Applications will be accepted through August 19 if the position remains unfilled.
- Brent provided an update from a recent meeting of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP), a unit of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) Commission on Food, Environment, and Renewable Resources,

Board on Agriculture Assembly (BAA). Brent noted that discussions during the meeting suggested potential for continued support from USDA/NIFA.

Other points:

- Communication challenge:
  - o Lists by academic titles could improve internal communication.
  - o Collaborative tools are not being used adequately.
- In the surveys previously conducted they were missing what people like about their jobs.
- Maybe bring back AAC newsletter: submit a report and send updates
- Deposit the AAC meeting minutes in a repository (Box was one suggestion), as IWP is not a repository.