Regents for a year

By your view, could the Regents more effectively guide the university's research, teaching and community service missions? If so, how?

Newkirk: I think historically the system of shared governance has worked very well in that the Regents have delegated the teaching and research efforts to the faculty. Look at where we've come in the last 100-plus years. It's in this time of perhaps the most dynamic change in the country and certainly in the state that the university will have to possess unusual vision and accuracy in predicting and preparing for the future, not just in terms of growth in the state—and, therefore, growth in the university—but in making sure that the university reflects the diversity within the state that it is preparing the leaders of tomorrow to represent.

Dob: From a student perspective, I think there is a need for the UC to rebalance the way we have traditionally weighted our threefold mission of research, teaching and public service. Specifically, I think that greater incentives or rewards for quality teaching are needed. And I think this can be done without devaluing the globally recognized research that the UC produces. It's the undergraduate something that must be done, in my opinion, as we anticipate tremendous growth in our student population, along with the changing needs of our state in the years ahead. In addition, I think the Regents are in a position now to take the next step of diversifying the undergraduate level. As a result of that, I think the Regents need to focus more rigorously on diversifying the graduate students, faculty and staff.

Q: Every organization has strengths and weaknesses. What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Board of Regents?

Dob: I think the Board's greatest strength is that it is made up of Regents who are genuinely proud of the university and who want to serve in its best interests. However, I believe that many of the Regents are not interested in taking seriously or respectfully the opinions of those who make up a large part of the UC, namely the students. This is perhaps their greatest weakness because the Regents' desire to serve the UC will remain just that, a desire, if they continue to marginalize the opinions of the students that the UC is here to serve first. In addition, I see the Board's lack of non-white, non-male representation as a serious weakness.

Newkirk: The commitment on the part of the members of the Board of Regents is serious, diligent and devoted. They share their tremendous experience and expertly willingly and to the benefit of the university. And I think they do an outstanding job of overseeing the business and fiscal affairs and in setting policy in those directions. Their weakness is that they are more or less out of the same mold. They're out of business and corporate America. There are very few women and for the most part the Regents represent one socioeconomic class. I think this could be better balanced.

Q: What challenges did you face as a “student” Regent in your tenure on the Board?

Dob: Whereas the gubernatorially appointed Regents can take years to develop their knowledge about issues, Martha and I were faced with the difficult task of trying to learn the issues in a much shorter time. And for me, the greater challenge was in fighting the stereotypes that I view the Regents as having that the student Regent is a predictable and unsophisticated voice. Learning to articulate and polish the concerns of students took most of my energy. I wanted not only to present the reality of students, but to do so in a way that my words would have a lasting impact on the Board. Finally, the greatest challenge was facing the painful task of receiving criticism from students who were unhappy with my inability to bring about revolutionary change. It's hard to explain what I see as a massively structural entry to students without sounding defeatist or cynical. And that's part of the reason the criticisms are there.

Q: As a woman serving on a historically male-dominated board, what barriers did you encounter during your tenure? What other barriers remain?

Newkirk: Early in my tenure there were two women among 19 appointed Regents. In fact, I was the third woman out of 28 Regents in total. Couple that with our short tenure and difficult task of gaining information, and being a woman just compounded the challenge. The roles, language, and behavior that the Regents are governed by, both in a formal and informal sense, are those of corporate America. Some of the women Regents have no experience in corporate America. It puts them at a disadvantage. It means that women have to work harder, be better informed and make an extra effort to articulate to their colleagues their ability to contribute in a very meaningful way. I think these barriers will continue to exist until the composition of the Board changes to reflect the numbers and percentages of capable women in society.

Q: Critical budget uncertainties, a dramatic fee increase and planning for a 10th UC campus in the face of rising enrollment were just a few key issues facing the Regents this year. What are your thoughts on these and other important matters before the Board?

Dob: The drastic budget cuts implemented recently were not easy to make. All the Regents felt the pain of having to make those tough decisions. However, I firmly believe that raising student fees by 40 percent in a year is an equitable decision. That's what I voted for. I think the students need to do their share, but they're being asked to do more than any other part of the UC. I want to be assured that the Office of the President researched every possibility, but from a student's perspective, I'm more inclined to think that some avenues haven't been explored.
came on the board I knew that the opportunity to vote on whether the university should begin negotiating another five-year contract would come up within my tenure and that I should consider this very seriously. I did. And each of the energy laboratories—Lawrence Livermore, Lawrence Berkeley and Los Alamos—talked to physicists and administrators systemwide on the campuses. I talked to faculty, and talked to students. In fact, I received the most correspondence on this issue of any outgoing president. There was a disproportionate amount of publicity on the issue so I went back historically and tried to make some sense of it. The university manages these laboratories as a public service. But the university only has a finite amount of resource to devote to public service. The question was whether management of the university was considering whether energy contracts were a wise choice to use those resources. After weighing this and the fact that the majority of Academic Senate on the campuses voted not to renew the contract—the first time they've done anything like that—I thought that the way the labs are managed now was not among the best ways the university could perform its public service obligation. I voted with the minority not to renew. The fact that a number of us voted not to renew seems like the wrong decision, so I have to take the blame for that. But I think the time has come that we have to look at this as a whole and decide whether or not we should continue this relationship.

Newkirk: There are numerous vignettes of little incidents that happened to me. One that's very recent, although not very important, was that a few months ago I was at the UCI Bookstore in the college's book store and a customer approached me and said, "I remember you. You lectured in my class." In fact, I had been invited to lecture in the University's School of Management class several months ago on public policy in higher education. He said very directly, "You promised us that there was only going to be a 10 percent increase. I probably did say that." He asked, "What happened?" I said, "I think this is one of the reasons why we're seeing a lot of criticism about the university. The regents are very sensitive to this criticism and they are all looking to prioritize the issues. Also, I hope the regents will someday prioritize the establishment of graduate student employment rights and the inclusion of domestic partners in university housing.

On a personal level, what were your most insightful observations and difficult decisions?

Newkirk: The issue that I spent the most time examining was the renewal of the energy laboratory contracts. When I nuclear labs was among the wisest of choices to use those resources. After weighing this and the fact that the majority of Academic Senate on the campuses voted not to renew the contract—the first time they've done anything like that—I thought that the way the labs are managed now was not among the best ways the university could perform its public service obligation. I voted with the minority not to renew. The fact that a number of us voted not to renew seems like the wrong decision, so I have to take the blame for that. But I think the time has come that we have to look at this as a whole and decide whether or not we should continue this relationship.

Newkirk: There are numerous vignettes of little incidents that happened to me. One that's very recent, although not very important, was that a few months ago I was at the UCI Bookstore in the college's book store and a customer approached me and said, "I remember you. You lectured in my class." In fact, I had been invited to lecture in the University's School of Management class several months ago on public policy in higher education. He said very directly, "You promised us that there was only going to be a 10 percent increase. I probably did say that." He asked, "What happened?" I said, "I think this is one of the reasons why we're seeing a lot of criticism about the university. The regents are very sensitive to this criticism and they are all looking to prioritize the issues. Also, I hope the regents will someday prioritize the establishment of graduate student employment rights and the inclusion of domestic partners in university housing.

On a personal level, what were your most insightful observations and difficult decisions?

Newkirk: The issue that I spent the most time examining was the renewal of the energy laboratory contracts. When I was chairman of the Board of Regents, I had the opportunity to vote on whether the university should begin negotiating another five-year contract with one of the energy laboratories. I decided not to renew the contract, and the majority of the Academic Senate on the campuses voted not to renew it as well. This decision was based on the belief that the management of the laboratories was not the best way for the university to manage its public service obligation. I voted with the minority not to renew the contract, and I think this decision was supported by the majority of the Academic Senate.

On a personal level, what were your most insightful observations and difficult decisions?

Newkirk: The issue that I spent the most time examining was the renewal of the energy laboratory contracts. When I was chairman of the Board of Regents, I had the opportunity to vote on whether the university should begin negotiating another five-year contract with one of the energy laboratories. I decided not to renew the contract, and the majority of the Academic Senate on the campuses voted not to renew it as well. This decision was based on the belief that the management of the laboratories was not the best way for the university to manage its public service obligation. I voted with the minority not to renew the contract, and I think this decision was supported by the majority of the Academic Senate.