



The year of challenges continues, but we are still standing, and the state of the division remains strong. When I wrote last spring, I thought we had endured a lot, and that was before the wildfires, evacuations, smoke, and ongoing chaos created by an ever-resurgent COVID-19. It is truly mind-numbing how many different problems and issues we have had to grapple with over the past 12 months. As I said at the Fall Breakfast earlier this month, I am now waiting for the locusts and flying monkeys to appear over the horizon at any moment.

So, the fact that we are all still here is a huge testament to our willpower and our dedication to the students and each other. I think that is really important to acknowledge. None of this year was normal or is yet normal. We are committed to doing the best we can in extraordinary circumstances.

The good news for the division is that we were able to make fabulous hires this year in both faculty and staff positions. The staff hires are vital, renewing and bringing enthusiasm to key units for us, including Information Technology Services, research administration, the central office, and the Institute for Social Transformation. We are also welcoming several wonderful new faculty, whose energy and excitement about being here reminds us that this is a desirable place to live and work, despite the difficulties of the past year. We remain a place people want to come to. We still attract folks from other divisions and from

other campuses. We are still the nexus and the core and the hub of a great university.

We also had some real successes. Our faculty put forward \$2.4 million in grant proposals during the month of August alone; this was during the height of the evacuations! And, within the space of a month, the Institute for Social Transformation produced two web pages of useful and relevant resources on [anti-racism](#) and [immigration reform](#). Meanwhile, the institute directors and staff helped move long-planned events into an online format, aided faculty and staff to do the same, rolled out a new [Building Belonging](#) program, and put together a powerful and timely [election series](#) suite of webinars.

The institute has been a shining beacon through the smoky days. And it is now beautifully represented by a new website, designed primarily by Andrea Limas, our assistant director for marketing and communications. One of the advantages of having a spiffy new website and other media channels operating at full blast is that it makes our important research stand out and attracts internal and external interest in new ways. We have several current research studies related to COVID-19 compiled in a [single web page](#), indicating the impressive volume of research being conducted in the Social Sciences Division and on campus in this critical area. We are also able to demonstrate the many collaborations we are engaged in, both internally and externally. The [All-In Conference](#) on community-engaged research is just one example.

Our impact on policy is enormous and growing. Rob Fairlie's work on the [effects of the pandemic on Black-owned businesses](#) is informing Gov. Newsom's decision-making, while Chris Benner's work on app-based delivery and transportation drivers is informing every voter in the state of California as part of the official *Voter Information Guide* (check it out in the "[Argument Against Prop 22](#)"). Many thanks to the website team, to Director Chris Benner and Assistant Director Mykell Discipulo, to the other fabulous staff members, and to the institute's [executive board](#) for supporting the faculty, aiding networking opportunities, and helping get our research out into the public domain.

Two new initiatives are beginning to take off in the division: [Global and Community Health](#) (GCH) and AgTech. GCH welcomes a new director, Matt Sparke, from politics; a new vice director, Grant Hartzog, from the Molecular, Cell, & Developmental Biology Department; as well as two new faculty in sociology and a new executive board composed of faculty from several departments across the five divisions. Many thanks to Hollie Clausnitzer,

Jessica Lawrence, and Colleen Stone for staffing a complicated search process, Nancy Chen for her work as diversity liaison, and several faculty for their labor on two unusual search committees. This initiative has already led to some seed funding and promising grant proposals, as well as engaged and collaborative cross-divisional work by faculty on degree program development.

AgTech is in the early stages of conversations among faculty and has the strong interest of the chancellor. The promise of this new initiative depends on the historical strengths and ongoing development of the Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS), which is now finishing up a successful year-long review under the capable new leadership of Director Stacy Philpott. The executive vice chancellor was impressed with the dedication and care that was put into the review process and was pleased with the results of the review. CASFS remains a jewel of the campus. Its history of sustainability and care about plants, people, and the environment is why our AgTech initiative, like our GCH program, will look and feel different from programs in other places. We will develop links between agriculture and technology that support and sustain small-scale, organic farms and enhance the well-being and health of laborers. This is our focus, because these are the things that matter to us.

Finally, one of the goals of the chancellor and the executive vice chancellor that continues to align with our priorities for the year is student success. This is an ongoing project that we will work hard on, focusing on climate and graduation rates, what derails people when and why, and what we can do to help them persist and become successful students.

Let me end by noting, as I did at the Fall Breakfast, that throughout this past excruciating year, we've cried a lot, laughed a lot, and generally rallied around each other as much as we possibly could. This year is not over. We still have a hair-raising election—and possibly many flying monkeys—to go. But hang tight, and hang together. The mantra for the year is: "Do the best you can." I look forward to seeing you all in various different Zoom events over the next several months.

Katherine

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