

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ



BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • RIVERSIDE • SAN DIEGO • SAN FRANCISCO

SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

OFFICE OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE
SANTA CRUZ DIVISION
125 CLARK KERR HALL
(408) 459-2086

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA 95064

EMAIL: senate@ucsc.edu
FAX: (831) 459-5469

To: University Committee on Committees
From: UCSC Committee on Committees
Date: February 15, 2006
Re: Nomination for Oliver Johnson Award – Michael Cowan

The Santa Cruz Division's Committee on Committees is very pleased to nominate Professor Michael Cowan to receive the 2006 Oliver Johnson Award for Distinguished Leadership in the Academic Senate. During his 37 years at UCSC, Professor Cowan has provided leadership in myriad ways. He served two years as Provost of Merrill College, six years as Dean of Humanities, and multiple terms as chair of the departments of Literature and American Studies. At the behest of the Office of the President, five UCSC Chancellors, and an array of vice-chancellors, deans, and provosts, he has worked on scores of task forces and advisory committees ranging in topic from land use, the quality of student life, extended learning, and the improvement of teaching to long-range academic and fiscal planning, the development of ethnic studies programs, and planning first for UCSC's College 8 and then, 20 years later, for Colleges 9 and 10.

Although these endeavors cannot be separated from Professor Cowan's abiding interest in and effects on the Academic Senate and shared governance, we set them aside here to concentrate on his more direct acts of Senate leadership, including three terms on UCSC's Committee on Planning and Budget, two widely separated terms as chair of the Santa Cruz Division, and his service as Vice Chair and Chair of the Academic Council and Assembly in 1999-2001. Michael Cowan's work in these positions reflect the range of his expertise, the effectiveness of his interactions with the many groups connected with the University, and his sustained commitment to certain principles.

First, Michael Cowan has worked for almost four decades to imagine and implement rational and effective planning – campus planning, campus-community planning, university-wide and state-wide planning – in relation to academic plans and curricula, budgeting and finances, physical planning, and University development. Simultaneously, he has insisted upon and worked to enhance the Senate's role as a legitimate and equal partner in all these planning arenas. Between 1974 – 77, he was a charter member and then chair of UCSC's first Committee on Planning and Budget which persuaded a sometimes reluctant administration to consult systematically with the Senate. Later, as chair of CPB in the early 1980's, he worked with the administration to develop a more comprehensive approach to collecting data to make that consultation more meaningful. As Division Chair at two especially difficult times -- in 1979-80 when UCSC was facing challenges of identity and transition and during the budget crises of 1994-96, Professor Cowan's careful explanatory letters to the faculty,

his use of forums and special Senate meetings, and his efforts to keep the faculty involved in planning for the immediate and more distant future were especially significant.

Among Professor Cowan's important contributions as Chair of the Academic Council were his efforts to develop new planning and review processes to permit more effective Senate participation, specifically with regard to coordinating the work of standing committees, reviewing proposals for professional schools, participating meaningfully in the discussion of UC's contracts to manage the national laboratories, and planning for graduate program growth and enrollment and graduate student support. Professor Cowan's Senate leadership at both the divisional and the system-wide levels has been shaped by his conviction that the excellence of UC requires effective planning – and that meaningful shared governance depends on planning processes that allow the Senate to help shape plans, not merely react to them.

Second, Michael Cowan has consistently and effectively used his positions of leadership to further diverse social and cultural perspectives in UCSC's and UC's curricula, research agendas, and recruitment, admission, and retention of faculty, staff, and students. As Division Chair in 1994-96, he set up processes to ensure the Senate's careful attention to issues raised by the Regents' adoption of SP 1 and 2 and proposals regarding admissions initiated by BOARS, on one hand challenging Senators to understand diversity in complex ways and on the other creating an atmosphere and opportunities meant to encourage dialogue and debate. As a direct result of this work, he became chair of the Chancellor's Commission on a Changing Campus whose recommendations for pursuing diversity remain a foundation for UCSC's continuing engagement with the issue.

As Academic Council Chair in 2000-01, Professor Cowan played an especially important role in coordinating the Senate's review of President Atkinson's proposals to rethink access to UC by considering changes to admissions policies. Working with the Chair of BOARS and the Academic Council, he helped orchestrate meaningful discussion of the dual admissions program, comprehensive review, and the nature and role of the SAT. When President Atkinson brought these proposals to the Board of Regents with the Senate's endorsement, news and eyewitness accounts make it clear that Professor Cowan's remarks on the Senate's behalf turned the tide and ensured the proposals' adoption. Perhaps most important, the Regents' action signaled a reaffirmation of the Senate's power to determine admissions standards.

Although these two examples are perhaps the most striking instances of Michael Cowan's "outstanding and creative contributions as evidenced by major impact on faculty governance" and "sustained excellence in serving the Academic Senate," we close by mentioning some representative examples of the ways his work has been valued by various groups in very different contexts. During and after his term as Chair of the Division, Professor Cowan transformed the Senate's token interaction with UCSC's Alumni Council by meeting regularly with the Chair of the Council and establishing annual meetings of the Council's Executive Board with chairs of key Senate committees. These changes form the basis for the UCSC Division's current close and productive relationship with the Alumni Council. During and continuing after his terms as Council Vice Chair and Chair, Professor Cowan did especially fine work with the Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates, testifying on its behalf before legislative committees and actively furthering intersegmental cooperation between UC, CSU, and the community colleges. Just as his involvement with ICAS extended beyond his term as Council Chair, so also did his membership on a subcommittee of the

President's Council for the National Laboratories, the Environment, Safety, and Health Panel where his interest in the social and cultural dynamics of the three laboratories added another dimension to the panel's predominantly technical and scientific concerns.

Finally, we note the qualities of Professor Cowan's leadership that have enabled him to contribute to the Senate so significantly: a concern for process that is based in a respect for individuals and a conviction that the best decisions result from enabling as many people as possible to become informed about issues and to engage in open dialogue and debate; the patience and expertise of an excellent teacher who knows how to encourage participation by providing information and analysis; the understanding that for cooperation to happen, it must be encouraged by institutional forms; the willingness to work very hard; and a seemingly boundless interest in and concern for every facet of the University. In his remarks to the Santa Cruz Division in November, 1994, Chair Cowan exhorted a faculty disheartened by unprecedented budget cuts and retirements of colleagues to realize "the high value of citizenship" in such circumstances and respond by engagement rather than disengagement. His own career was – and continues to be -- a prime example of exemplary citizenship and its importance.