

Chancellor's Monthly Update – June 2019

June 28, 2019

Dear Campus Community,

I am writing first to thank everyone who helped make our 65th commencement ceremonies a tremendous success. Nine formal events, including seven in four days, is an amazing production. About 6,000 students were eligible to participate, and nearly 4,800 chose to walk in one of the commencement ceremonies. It takes a core staff of nearly 50 people – many of whom are volunteers, plus a myriad of others to make this happen every year; and we should all be grateful for their selflessness.

Planning has begun for commencement 2020, and the campus will face challenges next year, some new, others ongoing. It's worth sharing a few, since we're entering uncharted territory.

Only a few short years ago, six ceremonies were sufficient to accommodate all of our graduates. This is no longer the case. With our nationally recognized improvements in graduation rates, addition of the Schools of Medicine and Public Policy, and our increases in graduate and transfer students, we estimate that 7,000 students will be eligible to participate in commencement 2020.

Staying with our current model would add two ceremonies and another day to the schedule, potentially extending the schedule to Tuesday after finals week. Most universities try to limit their ceremonies to the weekend following finals week, so that family and friends don't need to take time off work to attend.

At each ceremony, I sit on the stage and feel proud of the joyful students and pageantry on Pierce Lawn. Unfortunately, that idyllic view is not everyone's reality. Because Riverside weather in June is unpredictable and we don't have a large indoor arena, most of our ceremonies are outdoors in the mornings and evenings. Other campuses are able to offer mid-day ceremonies, either at large indoor venues or in cooler outdoor spaces. Presently, our ceremonies range in length from two to three hours.

Although this year was mild, we have in the past treated heat-related health emergencies; and unfortunately, large numbers of guests depart the venue before the events conclude, due to direct sun exposure or uncomfortably warm temperatures. Faculty and students have also departed before the ceremonies concluded. In

surveying students after commencement each year, their primary feedback has been to move the ceremonies indoors and to shorten the length.

Related to the venue, there are some additional challenges: uneven sight lines to the stage and video monitors; umbrellas, hats, and other items that obstruct views; crowd control issues; and misuse of alcohol and other substances.

It seems clear that we have passed the point where we can simply add more events in this format each year. It's time to rethink and re-envision this important time of celebration.

I recently engaged with campus-wide leadership to talk through these issues and brainstorm approaches to next year's commencement. We hope to preserve the cultural traditions and values that are uniquely UCR. Our goal is to create a weekend of celebration in which students, their families, friends, and faculty members can celebrate commencement in as meaningful, safe, and comfortable an environment as possible.

As we continue to gather essential stakeholder feedback, Interim Provost Tom Smith and I will plan to communicate an update in the fall.

Enjoy your summer.

Kim



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