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In Service to UC

When the UC Systemwide Academic Senate takes up business next fall UC Santa Barbara's Kum-Kum Bhavnani will be in the vice chair's seat.

Bhavnani, a professor of sociology at UCSB and a former chair of the campus's Academic Senate, has been appointed to the one-year term, after which she will automatically move to the lead role for a year.

"Service has always been very important to me, and this is part of my service to the University," Bhavnani said. "UC has been really fantastic to me — it has respected me, seen what I do as an academic. And that's why I want to see what I can do to make UC a better place. This is an opportunity to have a huge impact."

Bhavnani's appointment requires that she take a two-year hiatus from her teaching and research at UCSB. When her term begins September 1 she will team with Robert May of UC Davis, who currently serves as the UC Academic Senate's vice chair. Outgoing chair Shane White will return to UCLA.

Already Bhavnani's agenda is beginning to take shape.

"I'm interested in seeing what we can do in terms of the state legislature and how to get the legislature more interested in UC in a positive way," she said. "And I'm also thinking about students at community colleges coming in to the UC. President Napolitano is very enthusiastic that we accept one transfer student for every two first-year students. I want to see how that can work best alongside adequate support for all students. The problem is that the campuses are being given these

responsibilities but aren’t getting the resources that allow students to have a better experience.”

Diversity — in all its iterations — is also a high priority for Bhavnani. “I’m talking about the many different ways people think of it — ethnic, racial, gendered, and sexualized diversity of course – and I want to pay attention to diversity of thought, manner, everything,” she said. “So I’m interested in doing something around diversity for the faculty and the rest of campus communities that makes the UC even more excellent.

One thing she hopes to do sooner rather than later in her position as vice chair is visit each of the UC campuses and meet with the chair and vice chair of their respective Academic Senates and perhaps with their executive committees as well. “I did that on a small scale here at UCSB — I got to know every committee and every committee chair quite well,” she said.

With many years of UCSB Academic Senate under her belt, Bhavnani brings valuable experience to the UC Senate. “Being chair of this campus allowed me to see the whole range of issues that come up, in addition to those directly related to the curriculum,” she said. “Budget was, as always, a constant part of our consultations with the administration. During my time as chair, health care came up in a specific way for our campus: The Town Halls focusing on health care brought close to 300 faculty to the meetings. Senate is always there to tackle faculty welfare issues as well. Overall, I found that the faculty at UC are fantastic. They are really enthusiastic about working on behalf of the University.”

Bhavnani also brings the wisdom borne of university challenges. “Being chair of the Senate here allowed me to get the bird’s eye view. And that’s what I’m going into, writ large.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society.

All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.