State grants UC’s petition for impasse declaration in UPTE negotiations

A state mediator will try to help the University of California and the University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTE) union move closer to a new contract for about 3,300 health care professionals.

Due to a lack of progress over 18 months of bargaining, UC last week petitioned the state Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) for a declaration of impasse. PERB has agreed.

UC is disappointed no agreement has been reached. The university believes it has been reasonable and collaborative, offering a fair multi-year contract that includes:

- Annual wage increases that would more than offset the proposed university-wide pension contribution rate increases;
- Excellent health benefits now and upon retirement;
- A pension that very few public and private employers nationwide offer.

UC Davis has proposed that most employees in the UPTE-HX bargaining unit receive at least a **22% pay increase** over five years. For many job titles, the proposed wage increases for career employees are even greater to address market conditions:

- **Dietitians** would receive increases ranging from 23.5% to 34.5% over five years.
- **Radiation Physicists** would receive wage increases of up to 25% over five years.
- **Physician Assistants** would receive wage increases of up to 24% over five years.
- **Medical Interpreters, Case Managers, CLS, Audiologists, Cytologists, Nuclear Medicine Techs, Genetic Counselors, and Psychologists** would receive wage increases of up to 22.5%.

The initial proposed increases would take effect upon contract ratification; UC Davis proposed these wage increases back in February 2012. The wage increases include across-the-board increases and an annual step increase worth approximately 2% for eligible employees not at the maximum of a pay range.
The key issue in these negotiations is the union’s ongoing objections to UC’s pension reforms, which include:

- Increased contributions toward the cost of pension benefits from both UC and employees (currently 10 and 5 percent respectively, increasing to 12 and 6.5 percent respectively July 1, 2013).
- A new category (“tier”) of pension benefits for employees hired on or after July 1, 2013
- Revised eligibility rules for retiree health benefits

Like many other employers, including the state of California, UC is enacting substantive pension reforms that help UC address a $24 billion unfunded liability to its retirement programs, and enable the university to continue offering pension benefits that recognize our employees’ service and are also financially sustainable over the long term.

UC’s reforms apply to faculty and staff hired on or after July 1, 2013. Eight UC unions representing 14 bargaining units have already agreed. UC’s pension reforms are also similar to what has been implemented for state employees.

The university also provided UPTE with two pension reform alternatives, in an attempt to move discussions forward. UPTE has not accepted any of UC’s pension proposals.

PERB granted the university’s petition for an impasse declaration on Monday (April 22, 2013) and is in the process of assigning a mediator. Mediation is an advisory, confidential stage in the collective bargaining process in which the mediator meets with both sides and encourages agreement on as many issues as possible, if not the entire contract.

The university and union are required to keep the details of what happens in mediation confidential, so bargaining updates to employees during this period will be limited.

If mediation is not successful, the mediator will refer the university and union to fact-finding. In this stage, UC, UPTE and PERB each appoint one representative to serve on a three-member panel that hears presentations from both sides, makes findings and recommends terms of a settlement.

UC’s health care professionals are vital to providing excellent patient care at medical centers every day. The university seeks a fair multi-year contract and is committed to working through the mediation process. UC is willing to negotiate further on the total economic package and encourages UPTE to join the university in working collaboratively.