

# The \$100,000 Departure

## UCSC Administrator Paid Big Bucks to Resign

By Jennifer Webster-Burnham

CAMPUS COMMUNITY members are no longer surprised when the University of California announces that an administrator is leaving—and taking along a generous sum of public money. Shawn Choudhuri, who recently resigned from his position as UCSC associate vice chancellor for campus facilities, and will receive \$100,000, is part of a UC tradition. “[Paying administrators to leave] is definitely a trend,” said Eli Ilano, Student Union Assembly (SUA) chair.

However, questions concerning Choudhuri’s performance, and the administration’s unusual decision to pay off an administrator after the threat of a lawsuit, abound. “In and of itself, someone in Choudhuri’s position does not get an additional year’s salary [after leaving the University],” said Jim Burns, UCSC acting director of public information.

The University will pay Choudhuri, who had served as UCSC associate vice chancellor for Campus Facilities and Services since 1990, \$100,000 and \$500 a month for medical expenses until January 1995 or until he finds another job. The Campus Facilities budget will provide compensation for Choudhuri, who had been earning \$100,000 a year.

Burns admitted that enticing an administrator to leave the University by offering an extra year’s salary is not standard policy. “Situations like this are evaluated on a case-by-case basis,” he said. “There had been a lot of conflicts among [campus facilities] personnel.”

Personnel information is not available to the public, for reasons of privacy.

Critics of the Choudhuri package question the policy which allows a UC Chancellor and UC General Counsel to determine severance packages on a case-by-case basis.

Although this is standard severance package policy according to the Regents’ by-laws, campus community members question whether it is the best policy for UC. “This was a poorly executed decision, considering the state of the budget,” said Brant Smith, long-time Kresge student activist and former SUA chair.

Choudhuri’s supervisor Ed Coate, vice chancellor of business and administrative services, maintains that Choudhuri’s position was eliminated as a cost-cutting measure.

But many believe Choudhuri was forced out when Coopers & Lybrand, an outside firm commissioned by the University to review campus facilities, concluded that Choudhuri’s leadership was “ineffective” and that “dramatic actions are required.”

Coate denies that Choudhuri’s performance was poor, saying the problem was too much middle-level management in the department. “There were two people trying to do one person’s job,” Coate said. “The point I’ve been trying to make is I think it’s really important to eliminate positions that aren’t necessary.”

Coate said he does not know why the overlap existed, because he has only been with UCSC for one year.

But according to Andre Dunkell, retired campus facilities staffperson, Choudhuri had been hoping to be promoted

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to vice chancellor of business and administrative Services, the position Coate currently holds. “He thought he had the job made, probably,” Dunkell said.

In addition, Dunkell claims campus facilities was not a strong, well-functioning campus unit. “The morale was really bad at facilities,” he said. “It’s been very hard for the past three years.”

Coate confirmed that the department was

heavily immune to campus community activism. “To have somebody in one of these positions booted out is a revolution,” Smith said.

One big question that remains shrouded in bureaucracy is why UC, which retains a number of lawyers, buckled under when Choudhuri hired an attorney. “For some reason, the University didn’t want to deal with [the situation],” said Ilano.

According to Burns, settling the matter in court would have been “very expensive.”

*City on a Hill Press* was unable to reach UC General Counsel David Birnbaum before press time.

Though the official administration line implies the position was dispensable and was eliminated as a cost-cutting measure, a memo sent to UCSC campus facilities personnel in November indicates Choudhuri was a significant policy-maker.

“During Shawn’s tenure, and under his direction, a major new physical planning initiative was introduced to bring the campus master plan up to date and to develop an implementation strategy for the campus’ Long Range Development Plan,” the memo states. Authored by Coate, the memo also attributed the implementation of several other programs to Choudhuri.

The memo contradicts the firm’s conclusion that Choudhuri demonstrated poor leadership. “The loss of Shawn’s talents will be felt campus wide,” the memo said. “Shawn has displayed effective leadership in crisis situations and has brought to his responsibilities the perspectives of an active and articulate problem-solver.”

But student Amber Evans, a student who served on the Long Range Development and Planning committee headed by Choudhuri last year, said she did not consider him one of the more active meeting participants. “[Choudhuri] was much more, like, ‘here’s the agenda,’” Evans said.

The Coopers & Lybrand review team, which, after evaluating the results of the interviews, surveys and office visits conducted with dozens of employees, concluded that top campus facility administrators demonstrate “ineffective leadership.”

The report states that “the initiatives for the coming year as articulated by the associate vice chancellor [Choudhuri] are merely a laundry list of disparate activities, on a unit by unit basis,” and recommends that the University take steps to move out “those who are not making a significant contribution” to the department.

Dunkell says one problem with Choudhuri’s position was that many of his responsibilities overlapped with those of Physical Plant Administrator Dick Ely, whose performance the Coopers & Lybrand team also questioned. In addition, Choudhuri relegated some of his responsibilities at campus facilities to lower managers

in order to take on other tasks, essentially “organizing himself right out of a job,” according to Dunkell. “He played the game, and he came up empty,” he said.

Many say the risky games administrators play—and their consequences—are just a fact of life at UC. “Lots of administrators have been paid to leave,” said Dunkell. “It’s not a shock, but it’s not right.” **CHP**



in poor condition. “There was clearly a leadership problem down [at Campus Facilities],” he said.

Burns claims, however, that the Coopers & Lybrand report was “not intended to be a personnel review” and that it “did not prompt the decision to eliminate the position.”

Smith said he is amazed the University has acted at all, citing Campus Facilities as one of the departments most