Janet Napolitano has just been appointed by the Regents of the University of California to be the next President of this great university. It has been noted that she has impressive abilities and experience in several areas of the public sphere, but not in higher education. One may expect that she will start out on a “listening tour” of the campuses, to better acquaint herself with the existing structure, personnel and culture of this institution. That is a familiar “top-down” approach to gaining legitimacy upon assuming leadership from outside.

What I propose here is an experiment in “bottom-up” education.

Faculty, students, staff and many friends of the University of California believe that we know quite a lot about the greatness and the shortcomings of this institution. So let us attempt to provide a course of instruction to orient our new President to her job.

One may see this exercise as an inverse MOOC – an online class with (hopefully) one select student, being taught by any and all interested members of the UC community. It is also intended that this set of ideas and debates be accessible to all the citizens of California. (This is, after all, their university.)

The classroom will be this web site, UniversityProbe.org, where I plan to publish weekly lessons on focused topics and invite all readers to post their comments as essential contributions to the class.

Here is my proposed list of topics for the first four lessons:

#1. The primacy of public education.

#2. Executive compensation at UC and the misplaced corporate mentality.

#3. Bad financial bookkeeping and priorities.

#4. Overgrown administrative bureaucracies.

I invite others to volunteer their own lessons (e.g., on student debt, police management, shared governance, etc.) to provide a diversity of topics and perspectives. Send proposals to me at Schwartz@physics.berkeley.edu

Next week (July 29), Lesson #1 – The Primacy of Public Education

Comments may start right now.