

Three Questions for Jim Leedy, Executive Director, UCPath Center

Jim Leedy, the new Executive Director of the UCPath Center in Riverside, joins the University of California from Tandberg Data Corporation, where he served as Worldwide Director of Finance since 2007.

In his new role, Jim is responsible for the launch of the UCPath Center in Riverside and the full scope of services when the Center is operational. We recently posed three questions to learn his initial impressions of the University and his vision for the UCPath Center.

Welcome to the University! How do you see your role as someone new to UC benefitting the UCPath Center and the UCPath effort?

JL: The University of California is known throughout the world for academic excellence and access. It is exciting for me to join such an elite institution. That being said, the systems and processes that support UC's payroll and human resource functions are becoming difficult to modify and present a large operational risk to UC for ongoing maintenance. Simply living with old systems is a short-term budgetary solution. However, it presents a huge long-term risk to the organization for payroll operations. UCPath will change that.

UCPath will leverage today's technology to update UC's systems, processes, and support so the University can spend its time and resources on its core academic mission. Given my background, I am eager to share my knowledge of systems and practices that are common in the shared services environment yet are still not widely practiced in the public sector. We are striving as a team to ensure that people will be impressed with the level of service they will experience with UCPath.

UCPath is a new way of doing business for UC and you will soon have 190,000 "customers". What is your vision for delivering improved services to all employees throughout the UC system?

JL: That is our biggest challenge and our greatest opportunity. The University has grown up by having local people provide HR, personnel, and payroll services. If you work in a small department, you most likely know the name of the person who provides these services.

Naturally, providing services online and over the telephone will be a big culture shift for UC. That is not to detract in any way from the excellent job our employees who currently work in those fields are performing. But, with better technology and access to the latest information, we will be able provide more consistent support to all UC locations and individual employees.

With UCPath, there will be a knowledge based portal for online answers to many of the most common “How do I?” questions. Additionally, there will be one phone number to call, from 7 am to 7 pm, five days a week, to access an entire team of specialists in payroll, human resource transactions, and academic personnel. If the person you are talking to doesn’t have the answer to your question, they will know who on their team to escalate your question to and will stay with the issue until it is resolved.

My vision for UCPath can be summed up in two objectives: to give all UC faculty, staff, and managers the information they need quickly and accurately; and to treat all of my 190,000 new co-workers in a friendly and helpful way.

Some people have said that UCPath is too “corporate” for the University. How would you address that?

JL: I’ll answer that in two ways. First, if you think about what people mean when they say something is too “corporate,” it typically boils down to too “impersonal.” When I got my first job after college, I received a paper paycheck every two weeks and stood in line at my local bank to deposit it with a friendly teller. Today with direct deposit and online banking, I rarely step inside of a bank branch or see a teller but I greatly appreciate the speed, convenience and accuracy and wouldn’t want to switch back to the old way of banking.

Secondly, and this may be somewhat controversial in a University setting, but I will say being “corporate” is not all bad. Corporations have a bottom line that focuses decision-making and helps prioritize action. As a result, corporations are usually at the forefront of improved efficiency, service, and technology innovations. The University doesn’t – and shouldn’t – have the same culture as corporations do, but it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t strive to improve the services we offer to support our academic excellence. To expect anything else detracts from our mission.

I will offer a third perspective that is less abstract and more practical. Part of not being “too corporate” means understanding the University culture. Not just UC culture as a whole, but the unique culture of each and every campus and medical center in our system. That is why we are seeking to hire as many current UC employees at the UCPath Center as we can; so we will build a team that knows what it means to work at UC. I am very proud to tell you in our initial hiring, we have hired new managers and supervisors for the UCPath Center that come from five locations in the University, from both Northern and Southern California campuses and medical centers. And, I hope as we recruit for more jobs, we will be able to have all UC locations represented on the UCPath Center team. This is a very exciting time for UC and I look forward to making the UCPath Center a significant part of that transformation.

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