



Kum-Kum Bhavnani
Telephone: (510) 987-9303
Email: kum-kum.bhavnani@ucop.edu

*Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate
Faculty Representative to the Regents
University of California
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, California 94607-5200*

April 13, 2020

MICHAEL T. BROWN
PROVOST AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Re: UCPB Letter on Graduate Student Funding

Dear Michael,

At its April 1 meeting, the Academic Council unanimously endorsed the attached letter from the University Committee on Planning and Budget (UCPB), which discusses some of the structural issues that threaten the financial security of UC graduate students. The letter notes that full funding of graduate students is crucial to meeting a broad range of educational goals, and emphasizes that the situation affects not only UC graduate students and the graduate education mission, but also undergraduates. Indeed, graduate students are central to the delivery of undergraduate education and undergraduate research opportunities, and to diversifying the faculty pipeline. We know you are well aware of these issues, and appreciate that you are a strong and consistent voice in support of graduate education.

Council does not minimize the challenges in front of us. The COVID-19 emergency, and its effects on people around the globe, have forced us to reflect on the priorities we have for ourselves, as well as for the societies in which we live. In that vein, Council recognizes UC's enormous contributions in tackling the crisis, as well as the grave challenge the crisis presents, which includes the worsening of economic conditions, likely leading to additional financial constraints on UC's educational, research and service missions.

It is a familiar refrain that the research, educational, and service missions of the University are closely intertwined, and this comes to the fore even more starkly as we examine the situation for graduate research students. Graduate education and graduate students, as many have said, are the "soul" of a university: the often invisible yet central aspect for all research universities. Support for them, along with protecting the high quality of graduate education UC offers, is critical. I know you agree that shared governance, the bedrock of UC, ensures that the Senate is key to any solution that guides the University through our upcoming challenges. To that end, we offer to work with you at this time to explore ways to protect the research mission of the University by ensuring graduate student support is strengthened.

Once the immediate emergency is past and we have a better idea of UC's budget for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, we suggest that graduate student funding be included as an explicit element in budgeting models going forward, so that the soul of the university is simultaneously nurtured. And in nurturing that soul, we also nurture the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion, to ensure that UC will continue to be as excellent, if not more so, than it ever has been.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,



Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Chair
Academic Council

cc: Academic Council
UCPB



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND BUDGET (UCPB)
Sean Malloy, Chair
smalloy@ucmerced.edu

Assembly of the Academic Senate
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607-5200
Phone: (510) 987-9466
Fax: (510) 763-0309

March 23, 2020

**KUM-KUM BHAVNANI, CHAIR
ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

RE: Graduate Student Funding and Support

Dear Kum-Kum,

Recent labor unrest among UC graduate students has exposed larger structural issues that the University must address if it is to maintain its status as a world-class center for research and teaching. While much of the attention since the start of the wildcat strike at UCSC has been focused on the tactics and immediate demands of the strikers, it is vital that UC look ahead to consider the underlying challenges that have brought us to this point. Even if this strike were to be resolved tomorrow, the University would still face significant questions about the long-term sustainability of our model of graduate education. While we offer no easy solutions to this question, UCPB does have the following observations:

1. The problems of housing and, in some cases, food insecurity facing our graduate students are real and pressing. The severity of these problems varies by campus and in some cases by field/discipline within campuses, and not all graduate students face the same set of challenges. Given the real estate markets in which our campuses, and particularly the coastal campuses operate, however, housing is likely to remain an issue of grave concern for the foreseeable future. While these housing pressures affect all members of the UC community, graduate students are particularly vulnerable because of their unique status. Unlike faculty and staff, graduate students have limits placed on their ability to work in order to maintain their status as students and allow them to complete their studies in a timely fashion. Most thus must find ways to pay for their living expenses on the equivalent of a 50% appointment, which is particularly challenging given the housing situation in coastal California. Affordable graduate housing on most campuses lags behind that available to undergraduate students and has been hampered by lack of state support for capital projects. Nor are graduate students eligible for Cal Grants or most of the other forms of financial aid that help bridge the gap for undergraduate students.
2. The University must take positive steps to address the financial pressures facing our graduate students if we wish to maintain our reputation as a world-class university and serve the people of California. There have been some suggestions that Ph.D. students should find ways to self-finance gaps between their funding and expenses through loans or additional employment, putting them more in line with students in professional schools. Putting the burden on graduate students, however, threatens the competitiveness of the UC system in attracting the best students

and undercuts both our teaching and research missions. While the current labor situation has sometimes been portrayed as pitting graduate students against undergraduates, at the most basic level, the success of the graduate and undergraduate missions are deeply intertwined. Graduate students play a crucial role as TAs and Teaching Fellows, and failure to adequately fund or compensate them will not only make it harder to attract the best talent but will also create stresses invariably affecting the quality of undergraduate education. TAs who must drive exceedingly long distances or cope with constant financial stress or even food insecurity are not in a good position to offer the kind of quality education that we expect for our undergraduate students.

3. The situation is even more pressing when it comes to the research mission of the University. The production of Ph.D. students is a crucial factor distinguishing UC from the other segments of higher education in California. Attracting and retaining high quality graduate students is imperative to support the research of faculty members and departments, the reputation and ranking of our campuses (including AAU status), and to our mission of training the next generation of scholars and teachers for the state of California and the world. This realization has driven increasing graduate enrollments across the system and is also factored into the [UC 2030 plan](#) with its ambitious goal of increasing combined (graduate and undergraduate) degree production by 200,000. The state, however, does not fund graduate education in the same way it supports undergraduate enrollments, and until recently UC has made little or no effort to secure such funding. The failure to secure adequate funding to match the growth of graduate enrollments is in large part responsible for the current situation in which the UC finds itself with respect to graduate student unrest. Though cutting graduate admissions in some fields in order to offer more funding per student is perhaps a tempting solution, doing so would risk both undercutting the University's research mission in the present and narrow the pipeline for future teachers and scholars. We must also grapple with the fact that students serving as Research Assistants suffer from many of the same problems that have led to unrest among TAs, but their salaries are typically funded directly by faculty grants. Any solution to these issues must account for students serving as RAs in ways that ensure them a reasonable living wage without drastically undercutting the ability of faculty to conduct research. We recognize that this is a difficult proposition, but it must be faced head on if we are to retain our current research excellence while also adequately supporting and training the next generation of researchers.
4. Adequate funding for graduate students is also crucial to achieving UC's stated goals around diversity. If graduate student funding, whether through TA appointments or other sources, falls short of meeting students' needs, it will invariably lead to our programs being less accessible to students from low-income backgrounds who do not have the financial resources from family or other sources to close the gap. Given the long-standing patterns linking income to race/ethnicity as well as first-generation status, this puts the diversity mission of the University at risk. Diversifying our programs is crucial not only at the graduate student level, but also to the pipeline issues that constrain hiring of a more diverse professoriate.
5. Solving the challenging issues around graduate student funding and housing will not be a simple task and will almost certainly involve a combination of short-term (increased housing allowances) and long-term solutions (more subsidized graduate housing). We understand that UC faces many budgetary pressures and there is no simple solution, particularly to the issues of housing in impacted areas. But if the UC is to maintain its position as a world-class University system, it must, in partnership with the Legislature and the Governor, address these issues in ways that do not simply shift the burden onto students. In the near term, UCPB will work with

CCGA and other relevant Senate committees to examine the problem and possible solutions from a faculty perspective. Ultimately, however, any solution must involve collective effort and discussion that includes the administration and students as well as outreach to the Regents and the state government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean Malloy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sean Malloy, Chair
UCPB

cc: UCPB