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Friday December 13

Undergrads we still need your support!

Winter is Coming

The University administration is playing a waiting game with our demand for COLA. While they wait, they see us rapidly building momentum. They suspect, however, that by waiting long enough, our momentum will subside, and eventually dissipate. The administration hopes that we spend the next few weeks totally apart from one another as we seek relief from the breakneck pace of the fall quarter. It supposes that we will not be seen, but realizing that this is impossible, represents us as criminals and therefore as enemies.

Indeed, inasmuch as the latter claim is true their strategy has merit (now that they have centralized their administrative messaging, disabling the accounts of those who could offer undergraduates direct support, presumably disciplining those who stepped out of line), but it is based on the faulty premise that they can see below the surface. If they could, they might have predicted that their anti-COLA, campus-wide emails (most likely drafted by an overworked and poorly paid intern), would backfire as spectacularly as they did, and held off from sending them. They now seem to believe that they can easily break us by waiting for us to divide ourselves. However, if there's one thing that's been demonstrated time and time again, it's that the administration's field of vision is rather limited.

Another development they could not have foreseen is the actions simmering in the sciences, and not just on this campus. This is a key attack on the administration's institutional power. The sciences are where major University contracts reside and the largest streams of funding circulate. Baskin School of Engineering, for instance, has recently partnered with numerous Silicon Valley tech firms, launching its "Silicon Valley Extension" initiative in 2016. Boasting a 2.2/ 5 rating among former employees on Glassdoor.com, this initiative really does seem to represent an extension of UCSC's working conditions, differing only to the extent that they are imposed more directly by behemoth companies like Amazon and Google. Graduate students in STEM are broadly organizing across their departments and fields to combat the harsh working conditions of the lab and the arbitrary authority of many superiors. This is a welcome development and may prove decisive.

What's in a Demand?

New demands emerge in the course of a given struggle, and when that struggle is extended, they garner the potential to resonate more loudly and widely than anyone can expect. In the COLA 4 ALL campaign we can see how certain demands have already begun to proliferate, taking our actions into a new phase.

As scrutiny of the university intensifies and the cohesion of its power fractures, new ways of struggling against it come to light. It is possible that people will start demanding more than the university, at least in its present form, can accommodate. This is not necessarily an impasse, but rather an opening. Smaller class sizes, childcare, backpay for employees routinely wedged between bad contracts and bad management (which is to say all of us), direct-decision making in all campus affairs by students, the removal of campus-police are all increasingly on the table. The demand for COLA has the potential to push all these other demands to the surface, and intensify many other suppressed social conflicts. Our demand for a cost of living increase is not a struggle for higher wages, but one against a system that continually forces wages

below the necessary minimum for survival (and yes, it's true this minimum is much higher in Santa Cruz than elsewhere, which is precisely why this struggle kicked off here). Undergrads, the fact that the university system is predicated upon the allocation of debt toward the blackmail of your future labor merely defers this fact: 4-years here, 4-years there, makes little difference when the creditors call after working a double shift at Starbucks, or Peets, if you prefer to work "local."

Faculty

Today Vice Chancellor Lori Kletzer has implicated faculty directly in the submission of this quarter's grades, writing unequivocally that "faculty members are responsible for assigning and submitting final course grades." This is puzzling. Wasn't this the job of teaching assistants? The very work we are threatening to withhold? Undermining a strike action by ignoring that it is taking place is as foolish as ignoring the demands which led us to strike in the first place: both reveal that the administration is too out of touch and too cowardly to rule.

Can faculty be counted on not to enter grades behind our backs? Not unless they're pushed. Right now it's clear that by and large faculty will side wherever is most advantageous for them. Is this pure opportunism, or their class position in a decrepit institution that demands intellectual ingenuity at the expense of political obedience? In raising this question, we do not discount the real efforts made at departmental levels to support COLA. In contrast to faculty who continue to denounce COLA 4 ALL, some faculty-members have come (perhaps not only temporarily) to repudiate their narrow institutional privileges in still-emerging forms of solidarity. Though faculty have been pushed in this direction, a real sign of our strength, it cannot be counted on long-term, and must continue to be fortified. It is likely that faculty have a number of

demands of their own - what would it take for faculty to make them?

Shoutouts

Thanks to all of those who care for us, whose work and working conditions we oftentimes fail to stop and consider. Because of you, we can dedicate time and energy toward building our movement. Thanks to the undergraduate students who, though directly affected by this week's disruptive actions, continue to encourage, inspire, and sustain the COLA movement. Thanks to the many UCSC faculty and staff who have expressed their solidarity for COLA 4 ALL even when met with outrage and threats of discipline by the UC administration. Thanks to all of our friends, loved ones, and mentors from outside of the university whose outpouring of support not only continues to energize the fight for COLA at UCSC but also gives life to similar actions in many other workplaces. Your solidarity makes clear the importance of our deep interconnections, especially as COLA 4 ALL increasingly assumes a collective form. We are learning that no amount of online activism can substitute for this, and that our struggles must be sustained in our direct contacts with one another. Only when we meet do we truly touch each other, and ultimately become aware of what we all share and what we all need. Let us continue this work through the Winter.



Universal Cost of Living Adjustment
#COLA