Today, we gather at Kerr Hall, a fitting seat for UCSC’s middling administration, whose namesake, aside from being former President of the UC (his preferred title was “captain of bureaucracy”), elaborated an influential theory of the university in the 1960s. Kerr was instrumental in opening up the university (he called it the “multiversity”) to private investment. This “multiversity,” in his imagination, would include neither organized labor nor student dissent, but compliant consumers. When he wasn’t writing reactionary screeds, Kerr found his true calling outlawing protest at UC Berkeley, sending in hundreds of police officers to arrest demonstrating students during the Free Speech Movement. In addition to his characteristic contempt for students and workers, Kerr bequeathed to our institution the structure and resolve to effectively serve the most monetized interests, the most brazen state and military organizations. In Kerr’s day this was the CIA and the Atomic Energy Commission. Now it is Google, Palantir, GlaxoSmithKline and DARPA. The current administration aspires to confident elan of Kerrian captainship. But no amount of false conviction can conceal the lack of certainty over what they are steering. For the administrators are merely first-class passengers on a sinking ship.

The effects of this business regime on our “volatile” and “irresponsible” student body is catalogued in the daily lives of students across this campus. Undergraduates continually describe the furious tempo of ever-increasing expectations at UCSC. Rather than supporting students with their accelerating academic demands, campus services have begun to compete for their time. These “services” intensify student stress. It is as if anxiety has been pegged to tuition—both soar to untenable heights. The wreckage that falls from them litter the university landscape. Dorms are to be divided and subdivided, common space converted into cramped occupancies. Class sizes are multiplied, transportation services slashed, while the already prohibitively priced access to parking is, like public transit, overloaded. Critical programs, like Counseling and Psychological Services, are paraded on glossy literature but remain woefully starved for funds. It is against this backdrop that the stopgap measures, with which the administration proposes to solve a windstorm of deteriorating conditions, are met with the disdain that they deserve.

Under these conditions, who wouldn’t be excited to graduate, if only to escape?

Acceleration and squeeze.

These are dramatic substitutions for some of UCSC’s founding commitments and characteristics (still claimed as its most marketable attributes)—sardine-tin living conditions for spacious redwoods, assembly-line educations for small “liberal-arts” colleges within a research university, and indeed grades in place of substantive narrative evaluations. This institution’s best and most special features were originally products of student demand and design. While they have been steadily overturned by the administration’s austerity policies, we should not look back nostalgically but ask how we might make a university that works for us now, in the present. We are an integral community of diverse students and workers, and we have the capacity to change our relationship to this campus through the collective refusal of our current conditions, just as striking K7 workers are refusing right now.

The outpouring of undergraduate support throughout the COLA grading strike has been incredible. Graduate students are ready to support you in your struggle to get the education you came here for. The administration has largely been content to paint the undergraduate body as passive victims of our strike. This glosses over the many ways that you already are actively resisting their terms. The administration, as usual, is wrong in more ways than one (is this what a “multiversity” means?). With the very same irresponsibility that Clark Kerr misattributed to students, the current administration offers threats and mealy-mouthed promises. Their messaging does not pass even a minimal threshold of substantive narrative evaluations.

Our demand for a COLA is a struggle for more control over this university, a struggle which continues to implicate the university’s many deficiencies. In this light, the fight for student and worker power on campus assumes a renewed sense of urgency. Our presence is only just beginning to be felt.