

Graduate Students are on strike at UC Santa Cruz, demanding a cost-of-living adjustment to meet cost-of-living increases in the city that have outstripped wage increases by a factor of 5. The demand for a COLA is supported by the Santa Cruz Faculty Association. The issues go to the heart of the challenges UC faces.

Widespread and warranted concern about increasing costs of attendance facing UC undergraduates has dominated the headlines, whereas the situation of graduate students has been largely eclipsed. Yet graduate students play a crucial role in the ecosystem and economy of the public university. As a source of cheap instructional labor, they allow UC to offer undergraduates face-to-face teaching on a mass scale; their devotion is essential to maintaining a high-quality undergraduate education. Their labor similarly subsidizes the research that attracts federal funds and corporate sponsorship, while their academic excellence makes the university attractive to faculty. Their own scholarly achievements, of course, contribute to the reputation of the university, and the diversity of UC's graduate students plays a vital role in increasing the diversity of faculty nationally. They are the invisible lynchpin of public research universities.

The root of the problem has a familiar source. As universities everywhere face privatization, they not only seek new revenues but also cut costs by employing lecturers instead of tenure-track faculty. The results follow ineluctably: (1) the number of ladder faculty falls relative to the size of the undergraduate student body, and thus, (2) the number of graduate students falls as there are fewer tenure-track positions to fill. (3) The educational experience of undergraduates declined in quality as sections become larger; graduate students are on a treadmill, working harder and longer for the same pay, eating into the time they have for research. (4) As the prospects for secure academic jobs declines, so the demography of graduate students increasingly shifts towards those who can afford an extended period of training and research, and are willing to risk a precarious future as underpaid lecturers.

This can't continue. The situation is more dire in some fields than others, but it is a general trend across the university. Thus, we support the courageous graduate students at UC Santa Cruz, who are violating the no-strike clause in their contract in order to bring attention to the impasse they face. They are threatening to withhold grades - their only power in a lopsided struggle. If the University of California wants to retain its standing as an outstanding public university, it ought to treasure its graduate students, and pay them a living wage. If you agree, then we urge you to [sign the solidarity form here](#).

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