

Letter of Support for UCSC Graduate Workers

Monday, February 10, 2020
Berkeley, California

We, graduate students in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, strongly support the graduate student workers at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), as they strike for a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA).

In response to the severe housing crisis in Santa Cruz, graduate students at UCSC have organized around [a single, urgent demand](#): that the University of California (UC) provide a COLA that would bring every graduate student out of “rent burden.” Rent burden is defined by housing scholars as paying more than 30% of monthly income on housing costs; many Santa Cruz graduate students find themselves either rent-burdened or severely rent-burdened (paying as much as 50-70% of their monthly wages on rent). This single demand was delivered to the UC administration on November 7, 2019. On December 8, hundreds of graduate students at UCSC voted to begin a grading strike following UC administration’s failure to act. The strike swiftly garnered the [support](#) of faculty, undergraduates, and university workers at Santa Cruz and elsewhere. In late January 2020, Santa Cruz Chancellor Larive wrote a letter addressed to the UCSC community that simultaneously offered a meager “need-based housing supplement” and threatened to begin disciplining striking students. On January 30, hundreds of UCSC graduate students voted to initiate an open-ended teaching strike on February 10. Today we stand in solidarity with them.

As students and employees of the UC, we are familiar with the dire financial straits faced by our colleagues in Santa Cruz. Living in one of the most expensive housing markets in the U.S., we know, just as intimately as they do, how near impossible it is to stretch our salaries to meet our basic expenses. Most of us face rent burden or severe rent burden; many of us have been forced to take out loans or work second and third jobs to make ends meet. And we do this knowing that tenure-track positions in our fields are diminished and that we will likely continue to face precarious employment once we graduate.

As Berkeley’s own published estimates indicate, the UC knows that our salaries are inadequate to cover the cost of living in the Bay Area. At [current salary rates](#), the UC’s own [estimates](#) for graduate student housing costs in Berkeley leave Step I-III instructors with a standard (50%) appointment faced with an approximate rent burden of between 53 and 59%. We feel passionately about our work as teachers and researchers, but navigating this disparity between our wages and the cost of living has had profound effects on the time we have to write, instruct and mentor our undergraduate students, and contribute to the intellectual community in our department. For these reasons, we believe a COLA is also much needed at Berkeley.

We commend the graduate student workers at Santa Cruz for their bravery and are grateful to them for all they have done to raise the issue. We believe the UC should refrain from taking disciplinary action against these striking student workers and agree to pay them a living wage. We urge others to join us and declare their support as well.

Signed,

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Christián González Reyes
Caitlin Scholl
Simone Stirner
Thomas Sliwowski
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Saniya Taher
Ata Sunucu
Simona Schneider
Howard Fisher
Tara Phillips
Jocelyn Saidenberg
Emily Laskin
Johnathan Vaknin '19
Laura Wagner '17
Ramsey McGlazer '15
Katie Kadue '17
Diana Thow
Andrea Gadberry '14
Mary Vitali

Marlena Gittleman
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Pedro Hurtado
Evan Strouss
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David Simon '12
Kyle Ralston
Marianne Kaletzky '18
Alexander Lin
Lulu Kirk
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