

We, the graduate student workers in the Department of Communication at the University of California, San Diego, stand in support of the grading and wildcat strikes undertaken by the brave and dedicated graduate student workers at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Starting last quarter, academic workers at UCSC stood up for their rights and dignity and undertook a grading strike, demanding a cost of living adjustment. This demand emerged from the severe rent burden they face in Santa Cruz, paid to exploitative landlords, including the University of California. Since coming together to strike, these workers have received overwhelming support from their departments, faculty, other campus workers, alumni, fellow academic workers across the UC system, and UC Santa Cruz undergraduates. There is wide acknowledgment that a Cost of Living Adjustment is already a necessary step. Workers should never be asked to go into debt to do their jobs.

As graduate student workers and university housing rent-payers, we are familiar with excessive and exploitative housing costs. In the past five years, our graduate student salaries have increased 13%, while San Diego private rents have gone up 15% and on-campus housing costs have increased 52%, fully four times faster than our salaries. Our university administration also sees us as a double-source of value extraction, underpaying our labor and overcharging our rent and our fees. Our university administration also points at a bad contract, one which was rightly rejected by majorities at both UCSD and UCSC, in part for avoiding issues of exploding house costs. Our university administration also treats its budgets as inviolable, passing their cost overruns, their expensive vanity high-rises and their busted transit infrastructure onto students and workers. Our university administration also pleads “balanced budget” when confronted with their exploitation, yet every year finds room for administrators to increase their six-figure salaries. And our university administration is also attempting to transform our institution into an engine for neoliberal extraction, undermining our mission to educate and serve the residents of the state of California.

Last week, UCSC escalated the situation by threatening the immigration statuses of international graduate student workers who are on strike. This tactic is equally at home in the worst periods of racist and white nationalist strikebreaking history and our own era of unchecked violence from Border Patrol and Immigration enforcement officers. It is despicable that this threat was sent from the very office tasked with shepherding graduate student workers through their visa process in their pursuit of higher education and research. While Chancellor Larive engages in empty talk about ‘diverse teams’ and ‘principles of community’, her administration calls on the violence of the Department of Homeland Security to ensure workers carry the burden of an untenable university budgeting strategy. A public university in the state of California needs to do better.

The extortion of international students was followed by a series of attacks on picketers from militarized police from the California Highway Patrol dressed in full riot gear. Their attacks left behind a concussion, broken bones, and 18 students arrested. These students were then denied access to medical care, having been banned from the grounds of the university they produce every day with their labor. Nowhere has it been made clearer that the concern for students by Chancellor Larive and UCSC extends just as long as they remain rhetorical devices. Once these students have arms and legs and heads, they are disenfranchised, disavowed, and subject to beatings.

By refusing to deliver grades in an unjust and unlivable working environment, these educators are demonstrating, through direct action, that they will not allow the university to continue with business-as-usual. They are working to build a less exploitative future for us all by holding administrators accountable and answerable to the intolerable conditions they have created. These workers have been forced to withhold their labor from the institution that rightfully belongs to them by the landlording schemes of an administrative class sustained by student debt and precarious employment. The UCSC graduate students are an inspiration to their fellow students and workers. We thank them for their courage and pledge our active, ongoing material solidarity and support.

Signed,

The Graduate Student Workers of the Department of Communication, UC San Diego