

We, the graduate students in the Rhetoric Department at UC-Berkeley, stand in adamant support of the wildcat grading strike that graduate student workers at UC-Santa Cruz have undertaken.

Graduate students at UCSC went on strike at the end of last quarter to demand a cost of living adjustment, a demand that emerged, namely, out of their recognition of the severe rent-burden they face in Santa Cruz. Since coming together to strike, they have received overwhelming support from their departments, faculty, other campus workers, alumni, and most noticeably from undergraduate students, who led a solidarity rally at the beginning of this year. Behind the COLA demand stands the prospect of at once alleviating the financial burden that graduate student workers face and articulating a university centered on the needs of students and workers on campus, rather than on its preservation as a site of accumulation.

These problems are far from foreign to us. As graduate students at UC, we know our struggles to live on our monthly income are the same as those of our colleagues in Santa Cruz. And as students at Berkeley, we know as well how precarious it is to live on a graduate student wage in one of the most expensive housing markets in the U.S.

And the UC itself is aware of this crisis, even if it often chooses not to recognize it. The Rhetoric Department was under external review this year; the first paragraph of the External Review Committee report states:

"What was clear to the ERC throughout the visit, and in consultation with a broad range of communities, is that the Department's research excellence is threatened by the inadequate levels of graduate student funding. This not only affects the caliber of graduate students entering the program (...) but the capacity for graduate students to (in turn) mentor undergraduate students, to collaborate with research faculty, to build cross-departmental exchanges, and to build on the Department's reputation as a whole."

The report further states that "It is imperative that the University move to urgently provide financial packages commensurate with students' actual costs of living, and to integrate cost of living increases over time" (original emphasis).

In response to what has become a critical disparity between graduate workers' wages and our cost of living, and in recognition that such disparity profoundly affects not only our well-being but also the quality of our research, and teaching and mentoring of undergraduate students, we believe a COLA is much needed at Berkeley. We are thankful for all that Santa Cruz graduate student workers have done to raise the issue.

Signed,  
The UC-Berkeley Rhetoric Graduate Students