

University of California
Berkeley



416 Doe Library MC6020
Berkeley, CA 94720
510-643-7290
510-643-2185 *fax*
<http://arthistory.berkeley.edu>
art_history@berkeley.edu

Department of History of Art

March 11, 2020

Janet Napolitano
President, University of California
1111 Franklin St., 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607

Dear President Napolitano,

We, the undersigned senate faculty, adjunct professors, and lecturers in the Department of History of Art, UC Berkeley, write to indicate our support for graduate student workers across the UC system in their demand for a living wage. We call upon you to immediately open collective bargaining with student workers to address in good faith the unlivable conditions created by high costs of living and devalued labor. A university system that fails to compensate student workers for indispensable teaching labor at an adequate rate, driving them into housing precarity and food insecurity while also destabilizing undergraduate and graduate learning, is an educational system that fails to uphold its mission.

We stand with students, the UC Academic Council, Council of UC Faculty Associations, and faculty members and lecturers across the system in condemning the retaliatory actions taken against students at UCSC as well as the ongoing militarization of UC campuses and violent law enforcement response to nonviolent protest. We support the moral right of student workers to withhold labor and to nonviolently protest in support of their demands. We will not retaliate against students who engage in labor action in our department, and we will not report strike information to the administration or endorse or facilitate disciplinary measures taken against striking student workers.

Further, we reject the characterization of graduate student labor as apprenticeship, when, as the Academic Council has stated, “the success of UC’s undergraduate and graduate missions are inseparable;” when the quality of undergraduate learning depends on classes taught by graduate student workers alongside lecturers; and when the University’s research and teaching mandate is leveraged upon graduate student teaching appointments as a primary means to fund graduate student fellowships.

Given the punishing increases in costs of living experienced by student workers since the UAW contract was signed four years ago, we point to the self-evident inadequacy of the contractual annual cost of living adjustments. We find the argument that UC must refuse to reopen negotiation in order to maintain its “contractual obligation”¹ to be a cynical, even coldhearted expression of disregard for the precarity and suffering of student workers and disdain for productive conflict resolution in a crisis situation. We condemn the termination of graduate student workers at UCSC and the prohibition of future appointments as not only unacceptable retaliation to already vulnerable members of our community but as a violation of the authority of the Academic Senate and departments to make curricular decisions free of administrative intrusion and threats to academic freedom. For an administration to sacrifice UC’s shared governance through such actions is to further damage the University’s teaching mission.

We deplore the simplistic argument that graduate labor actions must end because they produce unacceptable impact and disruption, when graduate workers themselves bear the burdens of exorbitant costs of living, an unsustainable condition that impacts and disrupts their own wellness, productive teaching, and timely progress in their learning and research.² This argument fails to acknowledge that the University’s teaching and

research mission, as well as its moral authority, is degraded by labor exploitation and resulting precarity. And in this period of accelerating destabilization, we demand that UC commit to developing “instructional resilience” not merely through online tools for remote teaching but through the provision of living wages and benefits, thereby acknowledging that teaching is fundamentally about people and communities of learning that cannot succeed without supporting the welfare of all members of these communities.

In this statement we take a moral position against the direct and unbearable vulnerability produced by devalued labor. This vulnerability demonstrates the inadequacy of the UC-UAW contract to address the actual economic conditions faced by UC’s graduate student workers. To ignore this inadequacy and the precarity it produces is to threaten the interdependence of UC’s learning, teaching, and research communities and to diminish UC’s significance as a *public* trust for the *people* of California and beyond, who benefit as much from the University’s fulfillment of principles of fairness and inclusive equity as from its teaching and research missions.

Sincerely,

Eva Allen, Lecturer in History of Art

Diliana Angelova, Associate Professor of Early Christian and Byzantine Art

Julia Bryan-Wilson, Doris and Clarence Malo Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art

Whitney Davis, Chair of History of Art, Professor of Ancient, Modern, and Theory

Molly Fierer-Donaldson, Lecturer in History of Art

Aglaya Glebova, Assistant Professor of European Modern Art

Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Professor of European and American Art Since 1700

Atreyee Gupta, Assistant Professor of Global Modern Art, Modern and Contemporary South/Southeast Asian Art

Christopher Hallett, Professor of Roman Art

Imogen Hart, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Modern British Art and Material Culture

Jun Hu, Mr. and Mrs. Pai Ruchu Presidential Professor in the Arts and Humanities, Assistant Professor of Chinese Art and Architecture

Lauren Kroiz, Associate Professor of 20th Century American Art

Henrike C. Lange, Assistant Professor of Italian Renaissance Art and Architecture

Anneka Lenssen, Assistant Professor of Global Modern Art

Gregory Levine, Professor of Buddhist Visual Culture and Eco Art History

Margaretta Lovell, Professor of American Art and Architecture

Ivy Mills, Lecturer in Visual and Literary Cultures of Africa and the African Diaspora

Todd Olson, Professor of Early Modern Art

Lisa Pieraccini, Associate Adjunct Professor of First Millennium BCE Italy, Reception, Collecting

Sugata Ray, Associate Professor of South and Southeast Asian Art

Caty Telfair, Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Art

cc: Carol Christ, Chancellor, UC Berkeley

Paul Alivisatos, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, UC Berkeley

Lisa García Bedolla, Vice Provost for Graduate Studies, Dean of the Graduate Division, UC Berkeley

Anthony J. Cascardi, Dean of Arts & Humanities, UC Berkeley

¹ Claire Holms, UCOP Senior Vice President of External Relations and Communication, KQED *Forum*, Mar. 6, 2020, <https://www.kqed.org/forum/2010101876230/graduate-student-workers-strike-for-higher-pay-across-uc-system>

² See Paul L. Koch, “Addressing the Graduate Student Strike,” <https://dev-pbsci-intranet.pantheonsite.io/2020/03/02/addressing-the-graduate-student-strike/>