

UCLA MEMORANDUM

FACULTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
College of Letters and Science

A265 Murphy Hall
Box 951571
Los Angeles, California 90095

To: Darnell Hunt, Executive Vice Chancellor Provost
Andrea Kasko, Academic Senate Chair

Fr: Efrain Kristal, Interim Chair, College Faculty Executive Committee

Date: February 14, 2024

Re: Response to Future of Graduate Programs and Graduate Student Support Task Force Report

The College Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) at UCLA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Future of Graduate Programs and Graduate Student Support Task Force Report. The report and its findings were discussed at the College FEC meeting held on January 26, 2024. This response consolidates the main ideas that our faculty discussed and that they felt represent the concerns of the much larger faculty units that they were elected to represent and whose interests they are enabled to pursue.

Our FEC believe that there is room for additional exploration and creativity in proposing solutions to the challenges facing graduate programs and student support. Needless to say, our committee shares the grave concern raised by the task force regarding the need to address the financial strain experienced by departments due to increased graduate student support costs, particularly regarding the TA budgets and the impossibility of managing astronomical salary increases via grants, departmental funds, or other sources that are not adjustable over these time scales such that they cannot feasibly meet the needs being asked of them. As faculty strive to fulfill the university's mission of providing high-quality education and cutting-edge research, these unexpected financial demands—with no recourse to supply—profoundly impact the faculty's ability to carry out our obligation to the University, state, and students to teach and perform research at the very highest levels. Left with no other choice, academic units have already begun to reduce the number of TAs to create space for their higher salaries, and faculty advisors have begun absorbing the burden on our contracts and grants by reducing the numbers of graduate students being recruited. Thus, it's clear the new graduate student policies are already having detrimental and damaging impacts on our educational and research missions that run counter to the spirit of the contract agreements.

We echo the task force's call for greater support from state funding and from private donations, but several of our members wondered what concrete, novel, and collective strategies could be explored that would be more effective than previous efforts by our institution to garner such support. We strongly encourage the exploration of more specific strategies to garner support

from state or private sources that leverage the full power of the faculty *and* administration. On the administrative side, we call for an audit of spending across all major areas of the University, and the development of a plan to spread the cost. Such an audit should include current costs and the rate of growth of costs and disparities across academic and administrative units.

Administrative cost mitigations could include: 1) temporarily freezing administrative consulting contracts; 2) a temporary hiring freeze for administrative positions which are not central to the research and education mission of the University and which do not bring in additional sources of revenue. As a result, the UCLA administration and the UC Office of the President could provide funds to offset some of the increased costs for graduate students.

Faculty also voiced a widespread decline in morale due to the increased financial burdens, lack of a voice in contract negotiations, and the strain placed on the advisor-advisee relationship. The FEC asks the administration to reconsider how these costs and burdens can be shared, as it is sure to boost morale among the faculty knowing that the administration equally values our education and research missions.