

February 22, 2024

To: Andrea Kasko, Chair
Academic Senate

Re: **Future of Graduate Programs and Graduate Student Support (FGPGSS) Joint Task Force Report**

Dear Chair Kasko,

At its February 6, 2024, meeting, The Faculty Welfare Committee (FWC) discussed the report from the Future of Graduate Programs and Graduate Student Support (FGPGSS) Joint Task Force.

The FWC had an extended discussion on the FGPGSS report. Members wanted to thank the Joint Task Force for their comprehensive summary of the history and issues surrounding graduate education at UCLA. FWC members are generally supportive of the Task Force's recommendations since we consider the current situation to be non-sustainable and require immediate remedial action.

Members had specific concerns about the following issues, which generally apply to faculty welfare:

1. **The unfunded contract.** The new contract has resulted in a shortfall of \$31 million, which is needed to maintain the current ASE and GSR workforce. The report identified a number of solutions to make up the shortfall – e.g., increased tuition, NIH/state support, and philanthropy - however, none of these solutions seem viable to the FWC. In particular, the NIH has stated that it will not be raising the cap of GSR stipends, making it impossible to fund any stipend increase beyond that cap from NIH grants. Thus, there is substantial FWC concern that the faculty and their departments are now being asked to pay for a contract from non-existent funds they had no part in negotiating. *The FWC thinks that it is critical that there be faculty representation at any future rounds of UC contract talks and that any future contract must be assessed for unfunded mandates before an agreement is signed.*
2. **Reduction in student numbers.** The report suggests a number of ways to reduce the size of graduate programs to reduce the shortfall. However, reducing the intake of graduate students will reduce faculty effectiveness. While the contract considered all graduate students as a single division of student labor, the FWC noted that ASEs and GSRs, in fact, have very different roles in the university, with TA/ASEs being critical to the teaching mission of the university. At the same time, GSRs are critical to the research mission. Faculty on North Campus are already being asked to make impossible reductions in the number of TAs. In contrast, faculty on South Campus have had to let some of their GSRs go, thereby diminishing their research programs. *The FWC requests that UC/UCLA funds be identified to cover the \$31M shortfall to minimize the effect on both faculty and the current generation of graduate students.*
3. **The relationship between faculty and graduate trainee.** The FWC noted with concern the unaddressed issue on p35 of the report that the contract, by redefining graduate students as

employees, has shifted the relationship between faculty and students for the worse. Tensions have run high between students and their faculty mentors/graduate programs/departments, who are blamed for not having the funds to pay for a commitment they did not make. Moreover, the nature of the mentor/mentee relationship is at risk. Graduate students have historically been considered apprentices, who can take several years to find their path toward their research scholarship. However, years of relevant non-productivity is generally not acceptable in an employee. *More guidance from the university would help faculty navigate this new role.*

4. **The importance of graduate education.** The FWC reflected on the importance of graduate education for our educational mission. Continued California innovation, including a robust economy, requires Ph.D. level attainment in addition to the education of undergraduates. *Members expressed disappointment that UCLA has not been at the forefront of making the case for the importance of graduate education.*

Thank you for the opportunity to opine. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at butlersj@ucla.edu or via the Committee analyst, Renee Rouzan-Kay, at rrouzankay@senate.ucla.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Butler', with a stylized, looped initial 'S'.

Samantha Butler, Chair
Faculty Welfare Committee

cc: Kathleen Bawn, Vice Chair/ Chair-Elect, Academic Senate
Jessica Cattelino, Immediate Past Chair, Academic Senate
April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate
Renee Rouzan-Kay, Senior Policy Analyst, Faculty Welfare Committee
Members of the Faculty Welfare Committee