UCLA Academic Senate
Executive Board

November 23, 2022

Susan Cochran
Chair, UC Systemwide Academic Senate

Re: **UC Graduate Education Funding**

Dear Chair Cochran,

At the November 22, 2022, meeting of the Executive Board, members voted unanimously to send this letter.

As the University of California continues negotiations with the UAW and the strike continues, we are at a crossroads, and the path that the University of California takes will determine our future as a leading institution of higher education. We write to suggest the UC Systemwide Academic Senate draw on the last decade of important Academic Senate and joint Academic Senate and Administration reports about the graduate education funding model to advise the Office of the President by encouraging the bold pursuit of a new model of graduate education funding based on a new public compact.

We hold the view that the UC must think bigger than the current management-labor conflict and should boldly lead at this moment to advocate for a major infusion of funds into UC graduate education to address long-standing concerns in ways that could put us at the cutting edge of how graduate education is organized in California and far beyond. This ambitious goal is difficult, maybe impossible, to reach, but we urge the University of California to use this moment to forge paths toward it. The State gave the University of California the responsibility for research and graduate education, yet the State's funding approach currently does not appear consistent with its mandate. Rebuilding toward a brighter future is especially important at this time when the UC has been increasing graduate and undergraduate student diversity.

A Wealth of Analysis

The UC funding model for graduate education has been inadequate for a long time now, and there is an Academic Senate paper trail to show it. We are grateful to the Systemwide Academic Senate, sometimes writing on its own and sometimes in partnership with Administration, for the insights offered in these reports.

- 2022 Senate Academic Council endorsement of a letter from the Senate Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs and the UC Council of Graduate Deans on concerns about the future of graduate education and the impact of COVID-19: Mitigating the Effects of Covid on Graduate Students (PDF)

- 2020 Senate Academic Council endorsement of the Senate's University Committee on Planning and Budget's powerful letter, which discussed some of the structural issues that threaten the financial security of UC graduate students: UCPB Letter on Graduate Student Funding (PDF)
- 2019 Recommendations for Greater Support of Doctoral Education (PDF) from the Graduate Education Workgroup of the Academic Planning Council (a joint Academic Senate and UC Administration committee)
- 2012 Report of the Academic Senate Taskforce on Competitiveness in Academic Graduate Student Support (PDF) Adopted by the Senate Academic Council
- 2012 Report of the Joint Administrative/Senate Workgroup on Academic Graduate Student Issues (PDF)

On the one hand, reading these reports together shows that the Academic Senate has been offering keen analysis of the serious problems with our graduate education funding model; kudos to all who repeatedly, and with nuance, identified the key issues and advocated for change. Conclusions reached were consistent: "The state ... does not fund graduate education in the same way it supports undergraduate enrollments, and until recently UC has made little or no effort to secure such funding. The failure to secure adequate funding to match the growth of graduate enrollments is in large part responsible for the current situation in which the UC finds itself with respect to graduate student unrest." (2020, UCPB Letter on Graduate Student Funding, p. 4) "The University must take positive steps to address the financial pressures facing our graduate students if we wish to maintain our reputation as a world-class university and serve the people of California." (ibid., p. 1) "Adequate funding for graduate students is also crucial to achieving UC's stated goals around diversity." (ibid., p. 4) "It is the responsibility of the UC and campus leaderships to address these structural problems, to ensure the future of the UC is as successful as its past." (2022, Mitigating the Effects of Covid on Graduate Students, p. 5)

On the other hand, reading the reports is disheartening because the issues have not been resolved, and now the crisis has taken a new and dramatic form. Earlier reports couch academic graduate funding issues mostly in terms of competitiveness and recruiting the top community of diverse graduate students, but more and more they began to address wellbeing, dignity, and adequate levels of funding necessary for graduate students to live in our expensive cities.

A Model Straining

The model has been straining for many years.

The University of California mission of research, undergraduate and graduate teaching, and service could be severely stressed by the financial impact of contract settlements with the UAW (not to mention others that likely would follow in future years) if there is no infusion of new funding to offset these potential expenses. Faculty stand to lose a great deal, and the academic mission could be imperiled as research and teaching are reorganized and service competes with an ever-increasing faculty workload.

Perhaps now is the time when the broken model for funding graduate education be rebuilt, with the University of California and the State of California in the lead.

Advocating for Public Reinvestment in Graduate Education

It is easy to approach this labor dispute as a zero-sum game. Is there a possibility, instead, of turning this moment into a transformation of graduate education, based on a new public compact?

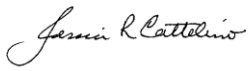
Over 30 state legislators signed a letter of solidarity with the UAW graduate student workers, and labor support is strong in Sacramento. Can the authors' own legislature be part of the solution? **What if the University of California settled these labor contracts contingent on a large and permanent funding influx from the state, earmarked for graduate student support?** Is this the moment to finally reverse the downward slide of public funding for graduate education?

When it comes to graduate student researchers, federal funding agencies profoundly shape how research gets done and who does it. In a recent letter, members of the California Congressional delegation weighed in on the strike. **What if the University of California negotiated an agreement with the federal funding agencies, Congress, and the Biden administration to build more graduate student funding support into the federal funding structure?**

Such ambitious outcomes are difficult to imagine, especially given the limited success of past efforts to secure more public funding for graduate education in the University of California. However, last spring a handful of donors convinced Governor Newsom to appropriate an eye-popping $500 million (over three years) for an external research institute to be located at UCLA. It would be an error, granted, to equate capital outlays with sustained funding for graduate student work and education. Yet the example raises the question as to whether the University is calling on our most influential alumni, donors, allies in state government, and administrators to make a similar case for graduate student funding per the repeated recommendations of the systemwide Academic Senate.

We urge Academic Senate leaders, both systemwide and divisional, to point to the wealth of Academic Senate reports and recommendations on graduate education funding and advocate for actions that will move us toward a brighter future with a new model of graduate education funding based on a new public compact.

Sincerely,



Jessica Cattelino
Chair
UCLA Academic Senate

Cc: April de Stefano, Executive Director, UCLA Academic Senate
Andrea Kasko, Vice Chair/Chair Elect, UCLA Academic Senate
Monica Lin, Executive Director, UC Systemwide Academic Senate
James Steintrager, Vice Chair, UC Systemwide Academic Senate
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