Dear Governor Newsom,

We write as the UC Santa Cruz Faculty Organizing Group, formed in 2009 to respond rapidly and flexibly to social, political, and legal crises affecting our campus and the University of California system as a whole. We are against the privatization of the public university. Currently, our immediate concern is UC’s response to the UCSC graduate student wildcat strike for a cost of living adjustment (COLA), which began on December 8, 2019 and is ongoing. In a letter dated February 14, President Janet Napolitano threatened students that if they failed to submit Fall 2019 grades and persisted in striking beyond Friday, February 21, their positions for Spring 2020 would be terminated. Since that time, and in response to that threat, we have witnessed a groundswell of support across the system and nationwide for the striking graduate students. This support includes:

1) On February 18, the Council of UC Faculty Associations (CUCFA)’s letter to the President calling for de-escalation and negotiation;

2) On February 19, two statements from the UC Academic Council, one calling for an agreement to be reached through new collective bargaining to address demands by graduate students for housing and food security (“Statement on UCSC Graduate Students’ Strike”) and one condemning the UC administration’s use of armed police at UC Santa Cruz (“Statement on Police Presence at UCSC”);

3) On February 19, the passage at the senate meeting of a UCSC Academic Senate resolution censuring the use of police on campus; urging the suspension of retaliatory measures, including already issued disciplinary summons and the threats of termination; and calling for substantive dialogue between the UCSC administration, UCOP, and the graduate students on a matter of system-wide urgency;

4) The issuing of 10 statements pledging non-retaliation against graduate students withholding Fall 2019 grades from departments across UCSC (Education, Sociology, Psychology, Latino and Latin American Studies, Politics, Literature, History, Digital Arts and New Media, Art and Design: Games and Playable Media);

5) News that graduate students at UC Davis, UC San Diego, and UC Santa Barbara have pledged to pursue strikes should UC administrators follow through on the threats to terminate UCSC students from current or future employment;

6) The issuing of at least three faculty statements of non-retaliation, now signed by more than 300 UC faculty, in support of graduate student workers who choose to participate in COLA-related actions at UCLA, UC Davis, and UC Berkeley;
7) On February 21, a march at UCSC that drew an estimated 1,000 protesters, including graduate students, undergraduates, faculty, lecturers, and staff;

8) On February 21, solidarity strike actions at 7 other UC campuses;

9) Statements from graduate students in 13 UCSC departments and divisions to date (Anthropology, Arts Division, Biomolecular Engineering, Chemistry, Earth and Planetary Sciences, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Education, Environmental Studies, Feminist Studies, History of Consciousness, Literature, Physics, Sociology) collectively pledging to refuse Spring appointments for positions vacated by disciplinary actions taken against the striking students;

10) A pledge of solidarity with UCSC student workers and supporting “a more equitable standard of living,” signed by 2,400 faculty from around the world.

11) Renewed demands from the UCSC faculty – affirmed in an all-campus letter with nearly 200 signatures – to support a robust graduate student COLA and condemning firings and other retaliatory actions.

12) A call from the California Labor Federation for the UC to bargain with the UAW-2865.

The need for a COLA is clearly not unique to UC Santa Cruz, and a system-wide demand for living wages is growing. The largest and best public university system in the world depends on its pedagogically trained graduate students to provide indispensable face-to-face learning in a time of increasing undergraduate enrollments throughout the state of California. Here at UC Santa Cruz, which has the highest student-faculty ratio in the UC, a faculty of outstanding instructors and talented and skilled graduate teaching assistants make it possible to deliver a first-rate education. Graduate students receive extensive, field-specific pedagogical training in inclusive teaching methods, thus enabling the professional success of an increasingly diverse undergraduate student body at a time of institutional underfunding.

Our graduate students are central to the everyday functioning and long-term future of the UC in many ways – not only as teaching assistants, but as research assistants, lab workers, and writing collaborators. Yet many, if not most, graduate students cannot meet their basic needs given the high cost of living in Santa Cruz, the third most expensive and the number one least affordable metro area in California, and indeed, in the entire United States. It’s not surprising then, that 60-70% of Santa Cruz renters are “rent burdened” and spend over 30% of their income on rent, while many attempt to make ends meet by living in overcrowded or unsafe conditions, enduring lengthy commutes, or facing periods of homelessness. The “California Dream” that you, Governor Newsom, so eloquently invoked in your State of the State speech in February 2020, is fundamentally built on the UC system. One of the most robust systems of public education in this country, the UC stands for social mobility and social justice; this is especially the case for our campus. These very values risk being dismantled as our graduate students suffer extreme housing precarity and higher education becomes available only for those privileged few who do not need a wage-earning job to pursue their degrees.

The firing of teaching assistants will seriously erode our ability to deliver a world-class undergraduate public education and to maintain the renowned doctoral programs that keep the UC at the forefront of cutting-edge research. Students whose appointments are rescinded will lose valuable training, incur further debt, become unable to continue in their doctoral programs, and in some cases lose visas and be obliged to leave the country.

The last two weeks have witnessed tremendous solidarity across UCSC, the UC system, and the country. Graduate and undergraduate students, faculty, and lecturers (who perform some 40% of teaching in the UC and whose own contract expired on January 31, 2020) have joined together. We urge you to listen to the thousands of people calling upon the University of California to become a national leader in promoting cost-of-living adjusted wage equity for the student workers in the UC. Do not allow the core mission, reputation, and future of the University of California to be compromised on your watch.
We ask you, Governor Newsom, to use your knowledge of the crises of housing in the state of California to encourage the UC and President Napolitano to:

1) Return to the bargaining table and negotiate with UAW for a cost-of-living adjustment for graduate students;

2) Address the need for additional funding to expand **affordable** student housing at UCSC and other UC campuses;

3) Initiate new investments in the University of California to address the lack of funding for the graduate growth initiatives undertaken over the last decade, and ensure that UCSC receives a fair share of these investments;

4) Allocate 150 million dollars per year to the University of California budget from the present state surplus budget and earmark those funds for cost-of-living adjustments for graduate student fellowships, teaching assistantships, and research assistant positions.

5) Appoint Regents who understand the California housing crisis, the importance of a world-class public university, and who will strongly advocate for the University of California system.

In this educational emergency, we call upon the State of California to work together with UCSC and all the UC campuses, UCOP, and President Napolitano to find a fair and lasting solution to the present crisis. California depends on this.

Sincerely,

The Faculty Organizing Group, undersigned below

cc: UC President Janet Napolitano  
California State Senator Bill Monning  
California State Assemblymember Mark Stone  
UCSC Chancellor Cynthia Larive  
UCSC Interim Executive Vice Provost Lori Kletzer  
Superintendent Tony Thurmond  
UC Regent John Perez, Chair  
UC Regent Laphonza Butler  
State Senator Connie Leyva, Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Education  
State Senator Maria Elena Durazo, Member, Senate Standing Committee on Education  
Mike Miller, UAW 2865  
Kavitha Iyengar, UAW 2865

**Signatories of the Faculty Organizing Group**

1. Amanda M. Smith, Assistant Professor, Literature & Spanish Studies  
2. Amy Mihyang Ginther, Assistant Professor, Theater Arts  
3. Anna Friz, Assistant Professor, Film & Digital Media  
4. Anjuli Verma, Assistant Professor, Politics Department & Legal Studies Program  
5. Camilla Hawthorne, Assistant Professor, Sociology and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies  
6. Carla Freccero, Distinguished Professor, Literature & History of Consciousness
7. Chris Benner, Dorothy E. Everett Chair in Global Information and Social Entrepreneurship, Professor of Environmental Studies and Sociology
8. Chris Hables Gray, Continuing Lecturer, Crown College
9. Christie McCullen, Lecturer of Sociology & Oakes College
10. Christine Hong, Associate Professor, Literature and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies
11. Christopher Connery, Professor, Literature
12. Cynthia Ling Lee, Assistant Professor, Theater Arts
13. Deborah Gould, Associate Professor, Sociology
14. Felicity Amaya Schaeffer, Associate Professor and Chair, Feminist Studies
15. Flora Lu, Professor, Environmental Studies
16. Gail Hershatter, Distinguished Professor, History
17. Hillary Angelo, Assistant Professor, Sociology
18. Jeffrey Erbig, Assistant Professor, Latin American & Latino Studies
19. Jessica Taft, Associate Professor, Latin American & Latino Studies
20. Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Professor, Literature
21. Lindsey Dillon, Assistant Professor, Sociology
22. Madeleine Fairbairn, Assistant Professor, Environmental Studies
23. Marcia Ochoa, Associate Professor, Feminist Studies and Interim Provost, Oakes College
24. Maywa Montenegro, Assistant Professor, Environmental Studies
25. Megan Thomas, Associate Professor, Politics
26. Neda Atanasoski, Professor of Feminist Studies and CRES
27. Nick Mitchell, Associate Professor, Feminist Studies and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies
28. Per Gjerde, Professor Emeritus, Psychology
29. Regina Day Langhout, Professor, Psychology Department
30. Robert Majzler, Lecturer, Psychology
31. Shelley Stamp, Professor, Film + Digital Media, UC Santa Cruz Presidential Chair
32. Shelly Grabe, Professor, Psychology
33. Stacy Philpott, Professor, Environmental Studies
34. Thomas Serres, Lecturer, Politics
35. T. J. Demos, Professor, History of Art and Visual Culture
36. Vilashini Cooppan, Professor, Literature and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies
37. Jennifer Kelly, Assistant Professor, Feminist Studies and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies