

March 1, 2020

**TO: UC Santa Cruz Faculty**

**FROM: Faculty Organizing Group at UC Santa Cruz**

**RE: A faculty response to the firing of striking graduate students**

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, on Friday 28 February iEVC Lori Kletzer announced that 54 graduate students who are withholding fall grades were fired from their spring appointments. Based on information we have received from some graduate students, which is still incomplete, this amount may in fact be as high as 80, as some students did not get dismissal letters but instead received notice that they are no longer eligible for Spring ASE positions. As a result of these firings, graduate students will likely have to leave Santa Cruz. All will lose healthcare, many will be unable to pay their rent, and some will have to relocate their families. For our international students (roughly one dozen in total), [dismissal means de facto deportation](#), a chilling fact that undermines UC's [non-cooperation with ICE](#).

The day before the firings, [the UAW filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge against the UC](#), claiming a violation of the Higher Education Employer-Employee Relations Act (HEERA). Multiple organizations, including the [AAUP](#), the [UC-AFT](#), [the UC-wide Academic Senate](#), the [California Faculty Association](#), and the [Council of UC Faculty Associations](#) have supported the COLA campaign and condemned the response of the administration. Individuals such as Bernie Sanders have publicly denounced the firings as “disgraceful.” In addition, scholars around the country are calling for a boycott of UCSC (a [preliminary petition has received almost 3000 signatures](#) so far).

Although we may hold different opinions about the tactics of a wildcat strike, students undoubtedly took significant risks because they [were hungry, sick, and exhausted](#) from working multiple jobs. The administration continues to emphasize the negative impact of the strike on undergraduate education. Yet, as a community, we can all agree that the current conditions for our graduate students, and their long-term impact on the quality of undergraduate teaching, are not sustainable. It is not possible to provide quality undergraduate education when our teaching assistants are struggling for survival.

**We deplore the administration's decision to fire these students rather than enter into negotiations**, especially in light of the UAW 2865's February 11 and 14 statements welcoming negotiations “over cost of living, including matters specific to Santa Cruz.” Moreover, on February 21, graduate students proffered the possibility of trading grades in exchange for removing disciplinary sanctions and setting a date for substantive discussion. Campus administration was unwilling to make this trade, declining to rescind the disciplinary letters or conduct summonses and reiterating that it would not engage in substantive conversations about resources while the students were still on strike. We again ask that campus and system-wide

administration immediately begin these “substantive conversations” with strikers; negotiation is the best path to a meaningful resolution to this situation.

Rather than see this as an isolated incident, we urge our colleagues to view the causes for this ongoing strike in terms of the [longer history](#) of misguided “growth initiatives,” [the California housing crisis](#), and the growing precarity of graduate students across the UCs. Without addressing these issues directly, as graduate students are demanding, higher education will only be accessible to the privileged students who can afford to live in Santa Cruz without going into massive debt. This is a grave threat to the [diversity of our campus](#) community and undermines the core values of public education.

**We support the request made by the fired striking graduate students to “cancel all classes on Monday, March 2nd and to attend [the] press conference at the base of campus at 9:30 am.”** Following the press conference, some of our colleagues will read statements of solidarity sent from scholars across the country. In 2009, faculty across the UCs staged a “walkout” in protest of furloughs and salary cuts. Now, the very livelihood of our graduate students are at risk, not to mention our own working conditions and the reputation of UCSC.

Please sign up [here](#) if you plan to make it, so we have a sense of numbers. Other ways to support include signing the faculty [petition against the firings](#) or donating to the [strike fund](#).

Best,

FOG Picket Line Working Group