



## Resolution 11: In Support of Our Graduate Student Colleagues Participating in the “Wildcat Strike”

**Abstract:** This resolution states support by the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly for our graduate colleagues striking at the University of California Santa Cruz, some of whom have been fired by their administration for participating in the strike, and for our graduate colleagues at other institutions in the UC system who are also on strike for a cost of living adjustment.

**Sponsored by:** Arielle Johnson, Life Sciences Voting Member

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**Whereas,** graduate students play a vital role in advancing higher education’s mission of conducting novel research and educating future generations; and

**Whereas,** in order to support this work, graduate students are given formal appointments by their home institutions with stipends designed to cover living expenses and, depending on the institution, tuition, health insurance, and other university fees; and

**Whereas,** these stipends are intended to not only compensate graduate students for their labor but also to allow them to focus on research and teaching work without needing to take additional jobs; and

**Whereas,** graduate students require stipends that, at a minimum, cover their basic living expenses in order to do the work expected of them by their home institutions while living in dignified conditions; and

**Whereas,** contracts for graduate students within the University of California system are set across the state; and

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**Whereas**, this creates the potential for conflict as the cost of living varies between institutions but the contracted salary is not set to cover the highest cost; and

**Whereas**, this conflict has become a reality for graduate students at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC); and

**Whereas**, the contracted rate for graduate students within the University of California, including students at UCSC is \$2,434, pre-tax, per month for 9 months out of the year, based on their United Auto Workers-affiliated union contract<sup>1</sup>; and

**Whereas**, Santa Cruz is a tourist destination and located in Silicon Valley, resulting in high rent prices such that the average one-bedroom apartment costs \$2300 or more by several estimates<sup>2,3</sup>, and \$1939 by UCSC's own estimate<sup>4</sup>; and

**Whereas**, even university-provided graduate student housing costs \$1211 a month<sup>5</sup>, approximately half of graduate students' pre-tax salary; and

**Whereas**, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development defines families spending more than 30% of their income on housing as rent-burdened, and families spending more than 50% of their income on housing as severely rent-burdened<sup>6</sup>,

**Whereas**, therefore, in effect UCSC's low stipend obligately places a severe rent burden on its graduate students, and forces some graduate students to forego food, healthcare, and/or childcare in order to afford rent; and

**Whereas**, the United Auto Workers-affiliated union contract also included a no-strike clause; but while this contract passed statewide, UCSC students voted it down by 83% due to concerns that it

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/02/11/uc-santa-cruz-grad-assistants-strike-living-wage-tough-rental-market>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rentjungle.com/average-rent-in-santa-cruz-rent-trends/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rentcafe.com/average-rent-market-trends/us/ca/santa-cruz-county/santa-cruz/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://communityrentals.ucsc.edu/cost/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://housing.ucsc.edu/rates/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/comm\\_planning/affordablehousing/](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/affordablehousing/)



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did not address their specific cost-of-living concerns as they live in one of the most expensive housing markets in the country<sup>1</sup>; and

**Whereas**, in September 2019, graduate students at UCSC began calling for a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) which would amount to an additional monthly payment of \$1,412, to cover the deficit between their contracted salary and the cost of living in Santa Cruz<sup>7</sup>; and

**Whereas**, students attempted to work with administrators to take action on their demands but talks failed to create any progress<sup>8</sup>; and

**Whereas**, in December 2019 UCSC graduate students voted to go on strike without the backing of the union that represents graduate students across the UC system making it a Wildcat Strike, hence the name; and

**Whereas**, graduate students participating in this strike withheld Fall 2019 grades and committed to withholding Winter 2020 grades; and

**Whereas**, graduate students striking were encouraged to continue to “not submit [grades] unless a student specifically requests that you do so” to minimize any potential consequence that withholding grades may have on undergraduate students financial aid<sup>9</sup>; and

**Whereas**, on February 5, 2020, teaching assistants received a written warning for withholding grades that threatened retaliation against strikers<sup>10</sup>; and

**Whereas**, it is reported that roughly 230 teaching assistants have not submitted fall quarter grades with more joining the movement with the start of a full graduate student teaching strike on February 10th<sup>11</sup>; and

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<sup>7</sup> <https://payusmoreucsc.com/campaign-timeline/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://payusmoreucsc.com/history-of-students-attempts-to-engage-admin/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://payusmoreucsc.com/january-10th-urgent-financial-aid-update/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://payusmoreucsc.com/response-to-written-warning-for-withholding-undergraduate-student-grades/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cityonahillpress.com/2020/02/20/uc-administration-threatens-to-fire-striking-graduate-students/>



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**Whereas**, during a February 12th protest 17 students were arrested<sup>12,13</sup>; and

**Whereas**, the administration continued to threaten disciplinary action against strikers, including threats involving the status of international students' immigration status;

**Whereas**, on February 19th, the University Council-American Federation of Teachers (UC-AFT) expressed their support of strikers stating "We fully support UAW 2865's demand to bargain over a COLA that adequately reflects the skyrocketing cost of living in California"<sup>14</sup>; and

**Whereas**, also on February 19th, the UCSC's Academic Senate voted "97 to 27 in favor of a resolution supporting graduate students in their fight for a COLA"<sup>5</sup>; and

**Whereas**, other graduate students in the UC system have since joined their UCSC colleagues in the Wildcat Strike for a COLA, both in solidarity with UCSC students and because many graduate students are rent-burdened throughout the UC system<sup>15</sup>, and

**Whereas**, these include: graduate students at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) who voted for a full strike which began on February 27th<sup>16</sup>; graduate students at the University of California Davis (UCD) who voted for a grading strike which began on February 27th<sup>17</sup>; graduate students at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) who voted for a grading strike which began on March 9th<sup>18</sup>, University of California Berkeley (UCB) graduate students who will begin a full teaching strike on March 16th<sup>19</sup>, and the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) graduate

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-02-14/17-arrested-during-uc-santa-cruz-strike>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/02/14/graduate-strike-uc-santa-cruz-leads-arrests/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://ucaft.org/content/uc-aft-condemns-president-napolitanos-threat-fire-striking-academic-student-employees>

<sup>15</sup> <https://uc-cola.herokuapp.com/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://dailynexus.com/2020-02-24/breaking-ucsb-graduate-students-vote-to-begin-full-strike-on-thursday-for-cost-of-living-adjustment/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://sacramento.cbslocal.com/2020/02/26/uc-davis-grad-student-strike/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ucsdcola.net/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.payusmoreucb.com/>



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students who voted to go on strike pending the approval of graduate students in specific departments on March 5th<sup>20</sup>; and

**Whereas**, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) released a statement of support for graduate students striking at UCSC stating that “Universities are creative places and we expect better from UCSC administration”, and that “we deplore the use of riot police against the graduate student picketers”<sup>21</sup>; and

**Whereas**, at noon on Friday February 28th, 2020, UCSC sent letters of intent to dismiss to 54 students and an additional 39 students were told they would not be eligible for spring teaching jobs, and the number of dismissed students has since grown to at least 74<sup>22</sup>; and

**Whereas**, the behavior of UCSC administration throughout the strike has been overtly threatening; and

**Whereas**, the firing of graduate TAs who are striking in order to earn enough to cover the cost of living is untenable.

**Be it therefore resolved**, that the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly stands in solidarity with our striking colleagues at UCSC and their actions to ensure a COLA for all UCSC graduate students so that they may continue to live and work with dignity; and

**Be it further resolved**, that we condemn the actions taken by administrators within the University of California system to retaliate against the Wildcat Strike by disseminating threatening written material discrediting the experience of graduate students and by terminating the employment of striking students; and

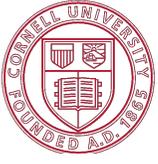
**Be it further resolved**, that we stand in solidarity with graduate students across the UC system who are striking in cooperation with the UCSC students or have taken other actions to support them; and

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<sup>20</sup> <https://dailybruin.com/2020/03/05/ucla-graduate-students-vote-to-strike-for-cola-pending-approval-from-10-departments/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.aaup.org/news/aaup-statement-ucsc-graduate-workers-strike>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2020/03/02/fired-ucsc-grad-students-speak-out-campus-prepares-for-impacts/>



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**Be it finally resolved,** that the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly encourages members of the Cornell community to use their own power to stand in solidarity with the Wildcat Strike whether that be through signing petitions, donating funds to striking students, or boycotting events held at UC campuses.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Arielle Johnson**, Life Sciences Voting Member

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