

Statement to the UC Commission on the Future
October 29, 2009

I don't think I need to go into too much detail about the ways in which graduate students are responsible for much of the research and teaching at an institution like UCSC. Similarly, everyone who is here already knows that this commission's charge is to consider the future of the UC. And so, you might expect that I am here today to tell you how graduate students can continue their contributions to UCSC in the future. However, that's not what I'm going to do. Because, to be honest, there are many graduate students here--myself included--who are uncertain that there is ANY future for them here at UCSC.

[And, as an aside, it is not reassuring that no graduate student received an email announcing this meeting, or that the UCSC campus calendar announced this meeting as restricted to "Faculty and Staff Only."]

What do I mean by no future for grad students here? I mean that recent administrative decisions here have made it much harder to be a graduate student--and there will surely be more hardship to come. I recognize that the life of a graduate student has never been easy, but difficulty is starting to tip into impossibility. How are we supposed to support ourselves and our families when TAs are disappearing?--fifty will be cut from the Humanities Division in the next three years. How are we supposed to conduct our research while flagship departments (such as History of Consciousness and Community Studies) and flagship research centers (such as the Dickens Project) are being defunded? Where are we and our families supposed to live as Family Student Housing--already the most expensive such housing in the entire UC system--raises its rent once again? How are we supposed to *live* as the cost of our health care continues to increase every year?--a cost increase that UCSC is beginning to pass on to us and our families. And please explain to me what we are going to do when the Regents vote to increase our fees by 32% over the next year? Our lives are precarious, and--every month, it seems--UCSC is finding ways to make them more so.

We know that times are tough. We know that California is in a recession and suffers from incompetent political leadership. We know that budget cuts in the UC have been felt across all levels of the UC system. And perhaps it's even necessary that every member of the UC be asked to make sacrifices in the future. But even if that's true, there's an asymmetry here. When top administrators or star professors or members of the Gould Commission think about the future, they think about the performance of their 401Ks, or the likelihood of getting new lab space, or where they can build their dream home. But when graduate students--and not just grad students, but thousands of low-wage workers throughout the UC system--when *we* think about the future, it's our very participation in the UC and *sometimes our own survival* that's in question. Will we be able to finish our education? Will we be able to pay the rent? Will we be able to visit the doctor? And so, on behalf of graduate students and workers here at UCSC, I would respectfully ask you, as you continue your deliberations, to think about *our* future and whether or not we are to have one at UCSC.