



COLLEGE EIGHT

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA 95064

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April 21, 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

This is a letter of support for UCSC sociology major Lori Nixon who has been suspended for her participation in the March 3<sup>rd</sup> protest that blocked Highway 17 in Santa Cruz, California. Lori was scheduled to graduate this June, and we are concerned that the university sanction will likely postpone her graduation until Spring 2017 or even later, while tarnishing her excellent record in academics and unfairly affecting her political activities in the community.

On April 10, the University issued an emergency suspension to Lori Nixon for violation of five sections of the Student Handbook and imposed the extreme sanction of suspension until September 1, 2016, plus 120 hours of community service, and the status of continual suspension upon return to campus. Lori's only required class for graduation, the "Capstone Course," is only offered once a year in Spring Quarter, so given a suspension until the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year, she would not be able to take that course until Spring 2017, placing her earliest possible graduation date two years away. Similar suspensions were also imposed on the other five students, delaying their graduation as well.

In relation to the Student Judicial Appeal Hearings for Lori and five other students ("Highway 6") on the alleged violation of conduct codes (to be held at Hotel Paradox on April 24), we wish to express our strongest support for their immediate reinstatement to pre-sanction academic status. We also urge the university administration to pay closer attention to these students' grievances; to carefully study why a large group of UCSC students and others, including the Highway 6, participated in large-scale actions of nonviolent civil disobedience; and, finally, we urge the university to issue a proposal regarding how to best respond to many of these student complaints and grievances.

Lori Nixon and these students were part of the "96 Hours of Action" held during the first week of March. A large number of students on Bay Area UC campuses organized similar political demonstrations over the course of four consecutive days. They protested UC's rising tuition cost and mounting student loan-debt; a shrinking state budget for education and significant cuts to student programs and services; overcrowded classes and overflowing lecture halls; further funneling of state budget to the expansion of prison, detention center, and policing; and an increasing trend of violent suppression against rising student activism on multiple UC campuses, including the establishment of a SWAT team at UC Berkeley and the "militarization" of the overall UC campus police apparatus.

The protesters' complaints and grievances were strongly shared across a wide spectrum of the student population. For example, the winter quarter student survey conducted in Sociology 103A (Statistical Methods) showed that the protesters' concerns were held by an overwhelming majority. Specifically, the survey (n=216) showed that 97.2% considered the recent tuition hike to be unreasonable; 98.1% said that the university should create a free and open healthcare program by procuring government funding, not relying on students' fee increase; 91.2% said they were already paying too much on housing both on and off campus; and 84% experienced hardship in enrolling in classes required for their majors. All sociology students, including Lori, had to take this required methods course, and its survey findings reflected grave concerns of many students and indicated their deep-felt frustration about the university's failure to respond to these concerns and problems.

In the history of public education in California, the UC system remained "tuition free" for the first one hundred years, until newly-elected governor Ronald Reagan instituted a tuition fee on California residents for the first time in 1968. Over the next several decades, the UC tuition fee gradually increased. In the last ten years, UC tuition has more than doubled, which has also contributed to the significant increase in student loan-debt. Today in the U.S., student loan-debt exceeds \$1.2 trillion, which is more than the total credit card debt. Further, President George W. Bush's signing of the "Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act" in 2005 eliminated student-debt "dischargeability" exceptions so that students will almost never be relieved of their debt through personal bankruptcy. The staggering burden of student loan-debt is now being compared to a modern form of indenture, and those in a student debt trap will have very few options after graduation, other than to work to pay off the debt for an extended period of time.

There is a long and respected tradition of nonviolent civil disobedience, as first expressed by the great 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Henry David Thoreau, whose well-known essay, *Civil Disobedience* appeared in 1849. After having witnessed U.S. war crimes against Mexicans during the U.S.-Mexican War and continued slavery in the American south, Thoreau engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience and was soon jailed. The case of the Highway 6, blocking a highway and causing a traffic jam by placing their own bodies onto a freeway, involved the choice to put their bodies in harm's way, for the sake of expressing widely-held student concerns and grievances so as to be heard by the administration, fellow students, and concerned residents in the community, while trying to force the university to effectively respond to many of their concerns and complaints.

Since 2010, student demonstrations have shut down the UCSC campus numerous times and the trend has increased in recent years. In 2014 alone, our students organized three large-scale protests and demonstrations; in April, both graduate and undergraduate students organized the "Unfair Labor Practices" strike. In this demonstration, 30 riot police were brought in and arrested 22 students. In November, many students traveled to San Francisco and protested at the UC Regents meeting which finally approved the tuition hike, while student protesters took over the Humanities Two building and many walked out of class to protest UC tuition hikes. In December, 400 students also walked out of classrooms to protest UC Regents' decisions. In March 2015, thousands of students at multiple UC campuses participated in demonstrations across the Bay Area, and here in Santa Cruz, Highway 6's action led to a community-wide awareness of these issues being protested, across a wide spectrum of the university community, including students, administrators, and even local residents.

Lori Nixon chose to attend UCSC because of its rich and revered history of student activism. Lori and five other politically conscious UCSC students engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience and expressed their political messages and opinions concerning what has been perceived as the university's failure to adequately respond to many of their complaints and concerns.

We support the immediate lifting of the university sanction, as we consider the university's failure to seriously address and sincerely respond to their concerns as the true catalyst for the continued student protests and demonstrations in the past and likely in the future. We thus urge the university's timely response to the student demands and grievances.

Your kind consideration to our letter of support for Lori Nixon and other members of the Highway 6 would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,



Hiroshi Fukurai, UCSC Professor of Sociology and Legal Studies

Co-Supporters (in order of endorsement)

Names of 2 Sociology Faculty, Sociology, UCSC

Names of 12 Graduate Student, Sociology, UCSC

Names of 139 Undergraduate Students, Sociology, UCSC