

May 13, 2020

Janet Napolitano, President
Office of the President
University of California
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Oakland, CA 94607

Transmitted Via Email: president@ucop.edu, regentsoffice@ucop.edu

Dear University of California President Napolitano and Board of Regents:

COVID-19 has brought extraordinary challenges to the University of California, UC students, workers and our broader communities. We understand the enormity of the difficult decisions that lay ahead. The University's commitment to no layoffs of career staff through June 30, 2020 has provided us and our families tremendous respite during such unprecedented times.

The COVID-19 crisis is not business as usual and it is this type of leadership that can meet today's challenges; decision making that values the people who run the University and who help fulfill its mission above expediency and short-term narrow goals. The course of action that UC administrators will take going forward will not only hasten economic recovery, or prolong it, but also determine who will shoulder the burden of the economic and public health impacts of the coronavirus.

As a \$40 billion enterprise and the third largest employer in the State of California, the UC has an outsized role in the State's economy. Accordingly, a more swift and equitable recovery will hinge directly on UC's commitment to the people who make the institution run every day.

You acknowledged as much when justifying the University's pledge to maintain full employment of UC staff until at least June 30, 2020. "UC is the state's third largest employer and we wanted to make sure we were not contributing to the economic disruption the state was experiencing and our employees had enough to worry about."¹

The University enterprise runs on the human capital of its workers and students. Any future decisions to cut frontline staff or faculty, or decrease UC students' financial aid, may literally be an issue of life or death for some of the more vulnerable members of our community. There are UC staff and students who lack basic necessities or face homelessness, many of whom are Black and Brown. As you know, research has already exposed their outsized vulnerability to the COVID-19 crisis.

Transforming the University of California as a keystone of our post-COVID-19 economy will require out-of-the-box thinking. It starts with an equity lens that places workers, students, and faculty at the center of decision-making. Austerity measures UC implemented during the 2009 recession created disproportionate hardship for its most vulnerable communities. The UC cannot repeat the same mistake.

As a broad coalition of students, faculty and other frontline staff, we call on the University of California to live up to its publicly stated goal to become a model employer and educator.

Throughout this pandemic, leaders across UC and our country have expressed gratitude and support for the frontline workers—janitors, educators, nurses, technicians and other frontline workers—who have

¹ <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/University-of-California-coronavirus-reopening-15239824.php>

put themselves in harm's way to keep essential services running, to care for the sick, and to protect our communities. But the true test of these sentiments is not just what we say during a crisis—but what we do once it is over.

Like you, our long-term vision is to see government reinvestment in public higher education. However, in the short-term, we believe the University must leverage its ample resources to ensure that budget decisions do not disproportionately impact its most vulnerable stakeholders.

To expedite a recovery, the University must commit to living these values:

1. **Prioritize workers and students.** UC must use all of its resources to keep people working and to support student living and learning. Reopening the campuses must prioritize the safety and health of UC students and its frontline workers over satisfying investors or credit agencies.
2. **Advance equity in all decisions.** The impact of decisions at the top must answer to the people at the bottom, including women, the working poor, Black and Brown students and workers. Prioritizing them will not only save lives but also speed up economic recovery and ensure the University retains its key strengths.

To preserve and transform the University of California to advance the equity of all Californians, we are calling on the University to:

1. **Keep All Workers on Payroll:** The University of California must commit to maintaining full employment of all of its staff, including its academic employees. Layoffs and furloughs disproportionately hurt the people on the bottom, many of whom are Black and Brown workers.
2. **Expand Financial Aid for Low Income Students:** The University must commit to providing its most vulnerable students greater financial aid to cover basic needs such as rent and food, including DACA and other undocumented students. Greater financial aid would help students not only weather the immediate crisis but also continue their education, research and employment amid tremendous financial uncertainty for themselves and their families.
3. **Workplace Health and Safety, Including Access to PPE:** The University of California must provide all employees with the highest standards of occupational health, workplace safety and personal protective equipment (PPE). UC should make available to all employees, and at all locations, the appropriate PPE, based on the precautionary principle, and should include education and training on protective gear, donning and doffing, and all other protocols relating to COVID-19. Since the pandemic began, we have seen scores of UC workers contract COVID-19. And, the deaths of fellow workers, including an AFSCME 3299 member and a Teamster member, demand that we prioritize the safety and health of UC workers as we move forward. University of California workers have a fundamental right to a safe and healthful workplace and infectious diseases should be no exception. Providing appropriate protection, including access to PPE for all UC workers is a fundamental and necessary part of limiting the spread of viruses.
4. **Cancel University-Issued Student Loans:** The University should not only suspend interest and payments on the \$140 million in education loans it has issued directly to students but cancel those debts altogether.

5. **Housing Security:** The University must ensure that students have access to affordable housing both on and off campus. This will require that the University continue to build more affordable on-campus student housing in order to ease the demand for student housing in off-campus private, market rate buildings. Rents should also be linked to student affordability, particularly for P3-developed housing, rather than pegging rents to a percentage of already inflated market rates. Lastly, UC must commit to stop using P3 developers for future housing development to better control housing costs. The University should also explore providing staff affordable housing.
6. **Reopen Campuses Safely:** The University must safeguard the safety of its students and staff by ensuring coronavirus tests are made widely available at both student clinics and its medical centers. It must also adopt physical adaptations and cleaning standards that allow the University community to adhere to social distancing guidelines safely on shuttles and in the dorms, dining halls, classrooms, laboratories, community centers, libraries, gyms, clinics and medical centers.
7. **High Quality Education and Research:** The University must renew short-term faculty contracts well in advance in order to ensure that students get the UC education they expect and deserve. Faculty and staff should be provided with all the resources they need to safely teach, conduct research and support students' continued learning and development.
8. **No Outsourcing or Offshoring of Work:** The University needs to commit and guarantee that it will not replace good UC jobs with low-wage contractors. As the third largest employer in the State, it needs to fulfill its responsibility to maintain market standards. The CARES Act prohibits small businesses who receive federal aid from outsourcing or offshoring work and requires neutrality in union organizing campaigns. These standards should also be followed by large employers, such as the University of California, who can most afford it.
9. **Retention of Historically Disadvantaged Groups:** The University must ensure that it puts measures in place that both retain and create new pipelines for historically disadvantaged populations within the UC community, including Black women. Studies have shown that not only are people of color concentrated in lower paying titles but that opportunities for advancement are more limited compared to their white counterparts. The University must also protect the resources available to support this community by protecting funding for resource/community centers, campus programs, workshops and counseling services.
10. **Childcare for All Employees:** As shelter-in-place mandates remain in effect, the University needs to make available free childcare for all employees who require assistance, especially frontline workers.
11. **Living Wage for Student-Workers:** Student-workers – including Academic Student Employees and Work Study students – are amongst the most economically vulnerable in the UC community. In an effort to provide student-workers more economic security, the University should provide living wages to student-workers that allow them to live near campus without experiencing crushing rent burden.
12. **Respect Collective Bargaining Agreements:** UC's unionized workforce is the backbone of the University and labor agreements provide economic security, staffing levels, and health and safety protections. In this pandemic, this is needed more than ever. Honoring union contracts is a must to ensure the safety and future of the University and its employees/academic employees.

13. **Retraining and Redeployment:** Work may need to be adapted to respond to the challenges of the current crisis in which we operate. The University must partner with Unions to provide adequate retraining and redeployment of staff where needed to adapt to potential changing campus and health staffing needs, and to maintain full employment of existing UC staff.
14. **Full Accounting of Federal Relief Support to UC & Students:** The University must be transparent in all the federal support it receives in response to the coronavirus, whether it flows directly through the federal government or through the state. There must be a full accounting in both the amount of money it receives, as well as how the money is disbursed to students and within the enterprise.

Fortunately, the University enters this crisis with a strong financial footing. As the University navigates the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, it has different strategies at its disposal to avoid austerity measures such as staff furloughs and layoffs, cuts in student aid, or increases in student tuition.

Already, the University of California can expect to receive \$260 million for its campus operations (to be split evenly between the needs of its students and the enterprise) and \$288 million for the medical centers, and with millions more flowing to the medical centers as additional federal monies are released. And, we will continue to advocate that subsequent government interventions include direct relief for both UC campuses and medical centers.

Another source of relief for the University is to take advantage of historically low interest rates and borrow to address cash flow concerns related to the coronavirus until revenues stabilize. A potential vehicle is the Federal Reserve's newly-created Municipal Liquidity Facility, which would allow the UC access to low-interest short-term borrowing. To date, the University could only access this lending program through the State of California, however advocacy efforts are underway to expand the program's scope so that universities can participate directly.

However, we know this will likely not be enough.

The University of California must leverage all of its resources, including billions of dollars in reserves, such as the Blue and Gold Pool, the Total Return Investment Pool and the General Endowment Pool. Many of these funds are unrestricted, discretionary, and highly liquid. Some designated funds could be reprogrammed, especially as some capital projects may be deferred to meet the new priorities required in these times.

Similarly, while a portion of its endowments may be restricted, there is nothing that precludes the University from reaching out to donors and asking them to lift their restrictions so that the University of California can meet its operational needs, such as aid to its most vulnerable students or to help meet payroll costs.

The University must also embark on a full accounting to identify where it can save money. It is reasonable to expect that this reassessment must start at the top, including restrictions on Chancellor travel and entertainment accounts or perks and bonuses that can reach \$1 million or more. These marginal reductions for highly-compensated executives are equivalent in cost to cuts impacting hundreds or thousands of low-income UC staff.

Finally, just as UC endorsed Prop 30, the “Millionaires tax,” UC must endorse Schools and Communities First, which would provide over \$12 billion in ongoing funding to education and local government.

Sincerely,

AFSCME Local 3299

UC-AFT

National Nurses United/California Nurses Association

CIR/SEIU

The Council of UC Faculty Associations

Teamsters Local 2010

UAW Local 2865

UAW Local 5810

UPTE-CWA Local 9119

Afrikan Black Coalition

USAS Local 720, UC Berkeley

Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan, UC Davis

Students for Justice in Palestine, UC Davis

USAS Local 143, UC Davis

Students Advocating for Immigrant Rights and Equity, UC Irvine

Students for Justice in Palestine, UC Irvine

USAS Local 65, UC Irvine

USAS Local 209, UC Merced

Labor Commission, UC Riverside

Providing Opportunities Dreams and Education in Riverside (PODER), UC Riverside

R’Kids, UC Riverside

R’Movement (USAS), UC Riverside

Underground Scholars, UC Riverside

Native American Student Alliance (NASA), UC San Diego

Queer Trans People of Color (QTPOC), UC San Diego

Students for Justice in Palestine, UC San Diego

Student Sustainability Collective (SSC), UC San Diego

Students Against Mass Incarceration, UC San Diego

Underground Scholars Initiative, UC San Diego

Undergraduate COLA Coalition (UCC), UC San Diego

USAS Local 94, UC San Diego

Generos Marginados Unidos por Justicia, Educación, y Revolución (MUJER), UC Santa Barbara

United Student Labor Action Coalition (USLAC) Local 805, UC Santa Barbara

College Democrats, UC Santa Cruz

Kresge Co-Op, UC Santa Cruz

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, College Chapter, UC Santa Cruz

Student Union Assembly Labor Commission, UC Santa Cruz

Worker Student Solidarity Coalition, USAS Local 501, UC Santa Cruz

Young Democratic Socialists of America, UC Santa Cruz

cc: UC Chancellors
UC Medical Center Chief Executive Officers