



April 25, 2023

Michael Drake, President
University of California
Office of the President
1111 Franklin Street
Oakland, CA 94607

Carol Christ, Chancellor
Office of the Chancellor
University of California, Berkeley
200 California Hall # 1500
Berkeley, CA 94720-1500

Benjamin Hermalin, EVCP
Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost
University of California, Berkeley
200 California Hall
Berkeley, CA 94720-1500

RE: Working Conditions and Educational Quality in UC Berkeley's EECS and Data Science Departments

Dear President Drake, Chancellor Christ, and EVCP Hermalin,

I urge you to reach a fair agreement with UAW in the ongoing negotiations over Academic Student Employee (ASEs) working conditions in UC Berkeley's Electrical Engineering & Computer Science (EECS) and Data Science departments that addresses chronic understaffing which has undermined quality of education in these flagship departments.

UC Berkeley's EECS and Data Science departments are two of the largest departments in the UC system, with approximately 40,000 course enrollments in the 2022-2023 academic year alone. Each semester, these departments employ over 600 UAW-represented Teaching Assistants, Tutors, and Readers to provide instructional services to thousands of undergraduate students. These workers – primarily undergraduates themselves – are essential to the functioning of these courses and the departments' educational mission.

As part of the recently-settled UC-UAW 2865 Collective Bargaining Agreement, the parties agreed to a side letter mandating further negotiations to address ongoing issues of exceptional understaffing and overwork that have become endemic to UC Berkeley's EECS and Data Science departments. In a survey sent out to the Academic Student Employees, 51% of respondents reported working an average of 30% over their paid appointment hours in order to manage their workloads, extending their office hours and staying late to try to help underserved students. Currently, EECS and Data Science students routinely wait for hours to receive help in office hours, prompting courses to limit each student to ten minutes of support in an effort to help as many students as possible, hurting students who need support the most. Students have also reported

being so discouraged by the sheer volume of people in line before them in instructional queues that they opt to simply not seek help.

I understand that, in order to achieve binding increases in instructional staffing, the Union has taken the unprecedented step of proposing lower wages and fee remission benefits for EECS and Data Science undergraduate TAs compared to what is guaranteed under the statewide union contract. While instructional workers shouldn't have to take lower pay and benefits in order for their employer to adequately staff instruction, I commend the TA union members for their steadfast commitment to their students and quality of instruction.

I am concerned that the University has proposed completely eliminating fee remission for the vast majority of undergraduate EECS and Data Science TAs, cutting their wages by 51% compared to the current union contract, and a non-binding pledge to increase staffing. Additionally, the Union has filed a ULP charge alleging the UC has committed 13 violations of labor law which has severely undermined the bargaining process.

As California's premier public university, UC Berkeley has not only the opportunity but the obligation to be a leader in setting adequate working standards for academic workers and providing high quality education to its students. I urge UC Berkeley to come to a fair agreement with UAW to improve the working conditions of all EECS and Data Science Academic Workers so ASEs have the resources they need to continue serving their students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jesse Arreguin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jesse Arreguin
Mayor, City of Berkeley