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April 26, 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.

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 regarding further negotiations to address ongoing issues of understaffing and overwork in UC

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Berkeley's EECS and Data Science departments. In a survey sent to ASEs, 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 10 minutes of support in an effort to help as many students as possible, and thus impacting students who need support the most. Students have also reported being so discouraged by the sheer volume of people in instructional queue lines that they opt to simply not seek help.

I understand that, in order to achieve increases in instructional staffing, the union has taken the unusual 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. I commend the TA union members for their commitment to their students and the quality of instruction.

It is also my understanding that, in response, the university has proposed eliminating fee remission for the vast majority of undergraduate EECS and Data Science TAs, thereby cutting their wages by 51% compared to the current union contract, and only 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.

For these reasons, I urge UC Berkeley to reach a fair agreement with UAW to improve the working conditions of all EECS and Data Science Academic Workers so that ASEs have the resources they need to continue serving their students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Buffy Wicks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Buffy Wicks
Assemblymember, 14th District