



OFFICE OF THE PROVOST AND
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
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August 5, 2025

ACADEMIC COUNCIL CHAIR STEVEN CHEUNG
EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLORS AND PROVOSTS

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to you with an update regarding ongoing negotiations between the University and the United Auto Workers (UAW) for the recently unified Academic Student Employees (ASE – TAs, AIs, Fellows, Readers, Tutors) and Graduate Student Researchers (GSR) bargaining unit that should be shared with all faculty. The University and the UAW met on July 8th and July 22nd to begin negotiating the terms of the new ASE/GSR contract.

As you know, I am committed to frequent communication with you and will do my best to be as informative as possible under some fairly significant constraints due to requirements of confidentiality. Because those limitations are real, I'm doubly glad that we have a faculty committee to lean on in understanding the viewpoints our faculty colleagues have on these matters. Despite our best efforts, we won't always achieve the goals they have recommended on your behalf, but we will come closer because of their contributions.

At the first bargaining session on July 8, the UAW outlined their three overarching goals for bargaining: compensation, job security, and enhanced support for international graduate student employees, including University coverage of legal support for students who experience problems with immigration. Over two bargaining sessions to date, the Union passed proposals on expanding protections related to immigration matters, the amount and length of paid leaves, workspace and instructional support, and discrimination/harassment protections. The UAW also presented a proposal on limiting work hours and class sizes, in addition to other proposals.

The University, in turn, proposed several provisions during the July 8th and July 22nd bargaining sessions that relate to required training and orientation, workspace and instructional support, employment files, grievance and arbitration, discipline and dismissal, as well as a collection of routine contract articles that would remain unchanged. The University proposals relate to, among other things, addressing circumstances of job abandonment and reaffirming that courses required for academic programs/academic progress are not employment.

The bargaining team is now working to determine the feasibility of UAW's proposals in light of our overarching goal to reach a fair contract that furthers UC's education and research mission and that is consistent with our operational and financial constraints.

Some of UAW's proposals would be very challenging for us to meet given the University's constrained finances and the continuing pressure so many are experiencing with respect to cancelled research grants. We are well aware of the budgetary and operational challenges the University faces against an ever-changing federal and state funding landscape. These negotiations are always a compromise between the parties, and our team will endeavor to achieve the best possible balance in any final agreement.

While the contract negotiations are occurring, I would like to bring to your attention two significant UAW arbitration cases that have systemwide impact.¹ First, an arbitrator recently issued a decision finding that the University violated the GSR collective bargaining agreement (CBA) by discontinuing pre-contract salary point (formerly "step") placement and progression practices following ratification. He concluded that the *Past Practices Not Covered by Agreement* article obligates the University to continue to place GSRs on the same "step" as the departmental practice was at the time the new GSR contract was implemented at the beginning of 2023. Additionally, he ruled that language in the *Wages* article (Section 32.F), which the University understood to grant discretion to change those practices, only permits departments to maintain, but not discontinue, previous salary point structures. The arbitrator indicated that he will rule that each location reinstate former practices, retroactively adjust affected appointments, and provide back pay, though he has permitted the parties to provide briefing on these remedies before they are finalized.

We recognize the decision is concerning for multiple reasons, especially the cost of its implementation, and we are considering all potential next steps. For now, we ask campuses to refrain from taking any additional action related to salary point placement practices for GSRs until further information and guidance is issued by UCOP. We will coordinate with your local central offices to circulate clear implementation guidance once a remedy has been determined.

Additionally, there is an ongoing arbitration and confidential mediation sessions concerning the classification of a subset of graduate students and whether they qualify as employees. The UAW claims the research students perform while on rotations in STEM labs, or while funded by internal and external fellowships, qualifies as employment. The union is thus arguing that these students should be in the bargaining unit and appointed as GSRs. We are closely coordinating on this case with stakeholders, including faculty who have, or will be, providing testimony in this matter.

As always, thank you for your patience with the negotiations process and your continued contributions to our academic community. I look forward to finding common ground with our union colleagues to reach a successful agreement that benefits the graduate student academic employees, the faculty, and the overall mission of University.

¹ By way of background, an arbitration is a form of alternative dispute resolution where a neutral third party, the arbitrator, hears evidence and makes a legally binding decision to resolve a conflict. These cases were filed prior to the beginning of bargaining by the UAW.

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Best wishes,



Katherine S. Newman
UC System Provost and
Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

UC Berkeley Chancellor's Distinguished Professor
of Sociology & Public Policy

cc: President Milliken
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