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Dear members of the executive leadership of UC Davis and UCOP,

We write as the Faculty of the Sociology Department at UC Davis to express our support for the graduate student movement seeking a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). The increasing disparity between pay and expenses for many of our graduate students is a pressing issue that must be addressed. The current COVID-19 pandemic in no way mitigates this urgency – indeed, graduate students are likely to be disproportionately impacted by the disruption to research opportunities necessary for completing degrees and securing future employment.

Graduate students provide crucial labor that supports the mission of the University of California to serve the diverse peoples of the state through the discovery and transmission of new knowledge. When funding fails to keep up with the rising cost of living, the resulting financial precarity weakens morale and compromises students' ability to conduct compelling research in accordance with this mission. It also compromises their ability to raise the stature of the UC both nationally and globally. Although cost of living varies by region and with shifting economic conditions, the long-term trend in California has been irrevocably upward.

Financial precarity disproportionately impacts graduate students of color, students from poor and working-class backgrounds, students with disabilities, and students (often women) with child- and elder-care responsibilities. These constituencies are well-represented in our program. Consequently, weak support for our graduate students undermines our department's ability, and the ability of the campus, to foster excellence through diversity and inclusion – a core value of public higher education. The current pandemic only serves to underscore the degree to which social inequalities and economic disparities are entwined.

We are deeply disappointed by the decision to fire 82 graduate students at UC Santa Cruz and the use of police force against striking students. Debate over specific actions and tactics aside, student workers across the UC system -- particularly in the social sciences and humanities -- need reasonable cost-of-living adjustments. As faculty, we will not retaliate against those who draw attention to this need. We urge the leadership of UCD and UCOP to bargain with students in good faith and on the basis of verifiable data about cost of living relative to wages, and we expect the union leadership to do the same.

Sincerely,

The Faculty, UC Davis Department of Sociology