



UNITED FOR A FAIR WORKPLACE

A report by the Academic Student Employees, Student Researchers, Postdocs, and Academic Researchers at the UC

Mansions for chancellors, rent burden for workers

How University of California leaders are worsening the housing crisis for academic workers, and what must be done

Executive Summary

The University of California, with 10 campuses, five medical centers, and three national labs, calls itself “the world’s leading public research university system.” Enrolling more than 230,000 undergraduate students and churning out world-changing discoveries at more than 800 research centers, institutes, laboratories and programs spanning health sciences, agriculture, biotechnology, computing, and more, the UC system truly is the crown jewel in our state’s higher education system.¹ Yet the 48,000 academic workers – Academic Student Employees, Student Researchers, Postdoctoral Scholars, and Academic Researchers – who do the majority of the teaching and research at the UC are struggling with chronically low pay and huge rent burdens in some of the most expensive housing markets in the country. This affordability crisis is worsening for UC’s academic workers, threatening the institution’s long-term ability to recruit and retain a diverse workforce of the best emerging teachers and researchers.

Unfortunately, in recent years UC leaders have failed to prioritize economic security for its frontline academic workers. Instead, the UC Board of

Regents has lavished huge raises on chancellors and other top executives, many of whom live rent-free in multi-million-dollar mansions provided by the UC. These misplaced priorities have exacerbated today’s crisis, lending urgency to the academic workers’ demand.

The 48,000 academic workers, through their

union, UAW, have come together to demand that the University of California negotiate minimum pay rates that relieve their rent burden and economic precarity. Specifically, the union members have called on UC to raise pay rates so that academic workers are not paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent, make rents in UC housing more affordable,

and guarantee access to university-owned housing for high-need groups.

The UC can afford the UAW members’ demands, which would constitute about 3 percent of the institution’s overall budget. Making this investment will bolster UC’s world-class teaching and research leadership for years to come.

“ Until recently, I had to live out of my car while working at UCLA because I couldn’t find affordable housing on my teaching assistant salary. UC has the responsibility to ensure the workers who power its education and research mission aren’t struggling to afford basic necessities. ”



Bernard Remollino, UCLA teaching assistant

¹ <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center> and <https://health.universityofcalifornia.edu/research>

The housing crisis for UC's 48,000 academic workers

The disparity between wages earned by academic workers at UC and the cost of available housing is huge and growing. The starting minimum annual income for a graduate Teaching Assistant or Student Researcher is \$23,246.50, and for a Postdoctoral Researcher it is \$55,631.¹ That reality, combined with the high cost of living in California, has led to today's housing crisis:

- * According to UAW membership surveys, fully 92 percent of graduate student workers and 61 percent of postdocs report being “rent-burdened,” meaning they spend more than the federally established affordability limit (30 percent) of their gross income on housing costs. The average graduate student worker spends a majority of their income – more than 52 percent – on rent, putting them in the “extremely rent-burdened” category. That means that the vast majority of teaching assistants and researchers are forced to sacrifice or scrimp on other basic necessities – like food, clothing, healthcare – in order to pay the rent.²
- * Low pay and high housing costs undermine UC's ability to recruit and retain a diverse group of top scholars. This in turn diminishes the research and teaching mission of the university, especially as UC wages lag significantly behind peer institutions. Academic student employees, for example, are paid at the bottom relative to UC's peers, even relative to institutions with lower cost of living.
- * UC's housing crisis magnifies inequities already reflected throughout broader society. Workers with disabilities, Black and Brown workers, LGBTQ+ workers, and international workers are disproportionately affected.

In the past, UC offered housing to these workers. But UC administrators' poor planning has created a shortage of affordable housing, pushing more of these workers into the hot private rental market, driving up rental costs for all renters in the

“ Over 70% of my monthly paycheck goes toward rent. Because my salary doesn't account for the high cost of living, I struggle to pay for basic needs like utilities, food, and health-care. ”



Joshua Herrera, UC Berkeley student researcher

area. Today, across all classifications of workers and students at the 10 UC campuses, there is a shortage of 325,000 university-controlled beds. This shortfall is slated to grow to 348,000 by the end of the decade.³

The extent of this crisis became more public last year, when UC Santa Cruz and UC Santa Barbara administrators were forced to rent out hotels to house students and graduate workers. Many students last fall reported having to live out of their cars or commute for hours every day, and UC Merced had to delay the start of the fall 2021 semester because of a lack of housing.⁴ In Santa Barbara and elsewhere, tensions are growing between the UC and local authorities over the University system's failure to meet its own long-range housing development commitments.⁵ These are not the hallmarks of a well-run public institution.

UC pay levels already are lower than those at many peer institutions. Compounded with the higher cost of living in California, this puts the UC at a competitive disadvantage in recruiting and retaining

“ I currently spend over 75% of my salary on rent. As a student with health conditions, I would not be able to cover my bills and food without financial support from my family; a luxury that is not available to the vast majority of workers. Without this additional support I would be forced to choose between my degree and my health — a choice that is keeping too many people out of academia. ”



Izzy Muise, UC Davis teaching assistant

“The cost of living differential between UC campuses and non-UC institutions is significant and contributes to UC’s competitive disadvantage.”

2017 UC Graduate Student Support Survey,
UCOP Student Affairs

graduate student workers, postdocs, and research scientists. The UC’s own 2017 Student Support Survey noted that “The cost of living differential between UC campuses and non-UC institutions is significant and contributes to UC’s competitive disadvantage.” When factoring in the high cost of housing, UC graduate worker compensation was \$3,400/year less than stipends at competitor institutions, the report found.⁶ This trend has worsened since 2017.

To make matters worse, UC uses their unilateral control over on-campus housing to charge rents that leave academic workers rent-burdened. For example, a UC San Diego or UC Berkeley graduate student sharing a 2-bedroom UC apartment is required to return more than 40 percent of their monthly income back to the UC in rent.⁷

Furthermore, because there is not enough UC-operated housing, UC housing managers on nearly every campus limit the amount of time a graduate student worker or postdoc can remain in UC housing, displacing thousands of academic workers every year.

“ Even with a 45 minute commute, I still pay over 50% of my salary in rent. Housing is so expensive that myself and many grad students I work with take off-campus jobs and internships to subsidize our lives as researchers. I even took a leave of absence for temporary off-campus work.”



Casey Meehan, UC San Diego student researcher

The housing crisis for these 48,000 academic workers threatens the ability of the University of California to fulfill its mission as the elite public research University system in the US. Without a solution to the housing crisis, UC’s graduate student population will become richer and whiter, with the economic benefits of higher education increasingly out of reach for working-class Californians, particularly first-generation college attendees. UC’s research will become increasingly dependent on those with independent means, rather than the most promising graduate students, postdocs, and academic researchers.

- 1 <https://apo.ucsc.edu/docs/scales-crnt.pdf>
Note that ASEs are typically appointed at 50 percent and without summer funding options, though there are exceptions. GSRs do not have a standardized pay scale, and their pay is often set to ASE pay. The starting postdoc salary can be found in the compensation article of the UAW5810 postdoc contract: <https://uaw5810.org/postdoc-contract/>
- 2 The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines cost-burden (rent-burden) as paying more than 30 percent of gross income toward housing expenses. Renters who pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing must sacrifice other basic necessities in order to manage. Data from UAW Local 2865 (2022) Bargaining Survey and UAW Local 5810 (2021) Housing Survey [unpublished data].
- 3 Data derived from multiple sources: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OCuFgZQ94e9zKnmmeZ3uJhLtnsfCjhb6/view>, <https://ucdavis.app.box.com/s/3b7029z14i9j8n2nr2vfenejl8kbs71h>, <https://cpep.uci.edu/physical/pdf/campus-lrdp/chapter3.pdf>, <https://equity.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/FutureFaculty-2014-WEB.pdf>, http://www.capitalprograms.ucla.edu/content/PDF/UCLA_LRDP_Amendment_Final_SEIR-January2018.pdf, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_California,_Los_Angeles, https://planning.ucmerced.edu/sites/planning.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/ucm_lrdp_final_5_2020-3-3.pdf, https://lrdp.ucr.edu/sites/g/files/rcwecm1811/files/2021-11/2021lrdp-final_0.pdf, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sv6C1r957kwLHIIXIs57_3y4WP6aXRh_/view, <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/sept21/f4.pdf>, <https://plandesignbuild.ucsd.edu/files/capital/CapitalProgramUpdate2019.pdf>, and <https://ucsf.app.box.com/v/UCSF-CGR-Projects/file/701727549327>.
- 4 <https://edsources.org/2021/thousands-of-uc-students-struggle-to-find-housing/661082>
- 5 <https://www.independent.com/2021/12/01/ucsb-housing-remains-in-crisis/>
- 6 <https://www.ucop.edu/enrollment-services/data-and-reporting/graduate-student-support/gsss-2017.pdf>
- 7 <https://hdhgradfamilyhousing.ucsd.edu/communities/nuevo-east.html> and <https://housing.berkeley.edu/explore-housing-options/family-student-housing-university-village/>

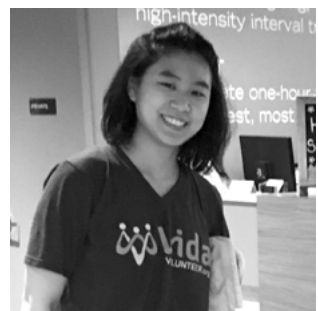
What must be done: Raise pay, end rent burden

Turning around the housing crisis will require a significant investment, both in the short- and long-term. But given the UC's vast resources, including its annual budget approaching \$50 billion, the challenge is not a lack of resources to tackle the housing crisis; rather, it is the lack of will to date by UC leadership to take the necessary steps. As part of negotiations for new and renewed union contracts in 2022, the UC's 48,000 academic workers represented by UAW have called for a three-pronged solution:

- 1. Raise pay to end rent burden for academic workers:** The UC should raise pay rates so that academic workers are not paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent. To relieve average rent burden throughout the UC system, graduate student workers would need a base annual salary of \$54,000, postdocs would need a base annual salary of \$70,000, and academic researchers would need pay increases of at least 14 percent. Additionally, annual increases in 2023 and beyond must be tied to the rise in cost of housing.
- 2. Make rents in UC housing affordable:** The UC should agree to set rents in housing it controls to ensure that no academic worker is paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent.
- 3. Guarantee access to university-owned housing for high-need groups:** The UC should guarantee affordable on-campus housing for disabled workers and workers with dependents and families. UC should provide temporary on-campus housing to international scholars who relocate to the U.S. to work for the University and are actively seeking off-campus housing.

The UAW proposals would lift the vast majority of academic workers out of rent burden, would secure housing for the most vulnerable individuals and families within the workforce, and would improve the institution's ability to attract a diverse teaching and research workforce for years to come.

“ Because housing anywhere near UCSF is completely unaffordable, I usually commute 30 miles to work by Caltrain, for which I pay about \$230/month including parking at the station. If UC covered public transportation costs and paid us enough to live in the cities where we work, academic workers could better focus on our research. This would also create an incentive for people to take public transportation, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions. ”



Jessica Ma, UC San Francisco junior specialist

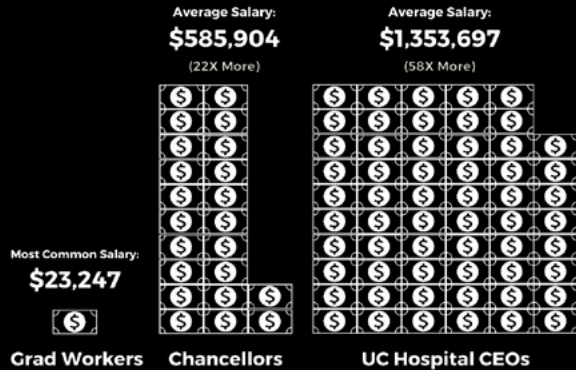
UC can afford the academic workers' demands

The UC can afford the UAW members' demands, which would constitute about 3 percent of the institution's overall budget. The UC's current operating budget is \$46.4 billion,¹ and its six-year capital budget anticipates spending \$75.1 billion between 2021 and 2027.² The UC system reaps billions every year in research grants. In recent years, UCLA,³ UC San Diego,⁴ UC Davis,⁵ UC Irvine,⁶ and UC San Francisco⁷ have garnered record financial support for their world-class research. Yet this bounty has not been shared with the researchers and postdocs who, day-to-day, are performing the bulk of this path-breaking research. In addition, the California state legislature just approved an increase of \$378 million in general fund revenues for the University of California, bringing total state support to a record \$5.1 billion this year.⁸

In describing the UC's budget, President Michael Drake boasts about “the strides the University continues to make on inclusion, access, and affordability for all students.”⁹

Pay Inequity at UC

UC is a public institution...and yet our worker-to-CEO pay disparities are comparable to Amazon (58:1)



Yet the University’s recent financial decisions starkly contradict Drake’s rhetoric. Earlier this year, the UC Regents announced the purchase of a \$6.5 million, 6,400-square-foot mansion to serve as a rent-free home for President Drake on top of his \$890,000/year salary.¹⁰ In the same month, the Regents also gave pay hikes averaging 18 percent to nine UC chancellors. The pay boosts – averaging nearly \$100,000 to each chancellor – bring chancellor pay to an average of more than \$585,000/year on top of the free housing and other benefits that the UC grants them. Indeed, systemwide, UC executive pay is 22 to 58 times more than the baseline graduate student teaching assistant or researcher salary. This puts UC – a public institution – in the same league as Amazon when it comes to measuring worker-to-CEO pay imbalance.

“ Approximately 61% of my pay goes toward rent at UCSF, leaving my family with inadequate funds to afford food, bills, health, and mental health care. I see our demands as essential for me to be able to continue my training and research in AIDS Prevention Studies here at UCSF. ”



Nozipho Becker
UC San Francisco postdoctoral scholar

“ Housing is rarely affordable for undergrads. Renters of color face additional challenges finding a place to live. It is particularly distressing to see my friends and coworkers face that struggle on top of their school and work commitments, never mind a commitment to their health and wellness. ”



Joaquin Quintero, UC San Diego tutor

The Regents made these decisions amidst the growing rent burden crisis for the workers who do the majority of teaching and research at the UC, and while many of them were forced to live in hotels, in substandard housing, in their vehicles, or far from campus.

Our Union’s proposals will require a significant investment. But given the size of UC’s budget and its overall financial success, the challenge is not the lack of resources to tackle the housing crisis; it’s a lack of will by UC leadership to do so.

- 1 https://www.ucop.edu/operating-budget/_files/rbudget/2022-23-budget-summary.pdf
- 2 http://www.capitalprograms.ucla.edu/content/PDF/2021-2027_capital_financial_plan.pdf
- 3 <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/ucla-draws-research-research-dollars-1-4-billion#:~:text=UCLA%20attracted%20record%20support%20for%20its%20wide-ranging%20research.Research%20support%20has%20grown%20by%2038%25%20since%202015>
- 4 <https://timesofsandiego.com/education/2021/08/18/uc-san-diego-breaks-record-with-1-54b-in-research-funding/>
- 5 <https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/uc-davis-sets-record-941-million-research-funding>
- 6 https://news.uci.edu/2020/07/20/uci-receives-record-529-million-in-research-funding-for-fiscal-2019-20/#:~:text=UCI%20receives%20record%20%24529%20million%20in%20research%20funding_strong%20support%20for%20campus%20mission%20July%2020%2C%202020
- 7 <https://cancer.ucsf.edu/news/2022/02/16/ucsf-is-top-public-recipient-of-nih-funding-for-15th-year>
- 8 <https://www.ebudget.ca.gov/2022-23/pdf/Enacted/GovernorsBudget/6000/6440.pdf>
- 9 https://www.ucop.edu/operating-budget/_files/rbudget/2022-23-budget-summary.pdf
- 10 https://www.berkeleyside.org/2022/04/12/uc-buys-6-5-million-berkeley-mansion-president#:~:text=University%20of%20California%20President%20Michael%20Drake%20will%20live_private%20fund%20paid%20the%20%246.5%20million%20sale%20price

What community members can do to support UC academic workers

The UAW's proposals to address the growing UC housing crisis will benefit not just students and workers, but the broader community. Therefore, we urge all community members – renters and tenant advocates, local organizations, other unions, and political leaders – to speak out in support of the bargaining demands of the 48,000 UC teaching assistants, postdocs, researchers, project scientists, readers, and tutors.

We urge you to:

1. Join UAW members at the picket line to demand affordable housing and good union contracts. Go to fairucnow.org/picket to find picket line schedules and locations on all campuses, and go to fairucnow.org/support to find other ways to express your solidarity.

» *Rent paid by UC Academic Workers since January 1, 2022: \$563,982,928*

» *Rent paid by UC president and chancellors: \$0*

2. Write a statement of support on behalf of your union or organization urging the University of California to fully agree to the UAW's bargaining proposals to end rent burden, set rents in UC housing to be affordable, and expand UC housing opportunities, especially for people with disabilities, families, and international students and scholars.

Send your letter to: communications@uc-uaw.org

We are academic workers at the University of California organized within UAW 5810, UAW 2865 and the newly-formed SRU-UAW. We are Postdocs, Academic Researchers, Graduate Student Researchers, Trainees, Fellows, Graduate Student Instructors, Readers, and Tutors. And we are united in our demands for a fair workplace.

