

# Student Advocacy, Governance, and Engagement (SAGE)

A Proposal to Strengthen the Independence, Integrity, and Accountability  
of the University of California Student Association



The **UC Student Association** is the official voice of over 240,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students from all ten UC campuses. It is our mission to advocate on behalf of current and future students for the accessibility, affordability, and quality of the UC system. Learn more about our work at [www.ucs.org](http://www.ucs.org).

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# **Proposal**

For the purpose of guaranteeing the independence, integrity, and accountability of the statewide student association for all students of the University of California system, a voluntary opt-out student advocacy, governance, and engagement fee of four to six<sup>1</sup> dollars per student per academic year, adjusted regularly for inflation, should be established and distributed to the University of California Student Association in replacement of the present mandatory membership dues funding model.

## **Current Problems**

### Incomplete Membership

As of the reinduction of the Associated Students at Irvine and Davis Graduate Student Association at the September 2015 Board meeting, UCSA now represents approximately 225,111 students, or 92% of the system student population. A little under one in ten UC students still do not have voting representation on the UCSA Board of Directors. Without access to resources made only available to UCSA as the recognized system-wide organization, non-member associations face institutional barriers in getting their issues to a level of awareness where they may be resolved, and having the resources to do so.

Membership in UCSA is supported by the payment of dues, a process that is closely controlled by an association's external vice president. UCSA is thus dependent on a strong and seamless transition that prepares campus leadership with the huge responsibilities of maintaining participation in UCSA; indeed, when such transitions are neither strong nor seamless, associations are at a greater risk of defaulting to non-member status.

### Political Fallout from Controversial Decisions

As UCSA considers controversial topics, the possibility of withdrawal from member associations on the losing end of a vote continually threatens the stability of the organization. If the dissenting organization decides to withdraw dues, a significant budget reduction may result. As membership in UCSA rests with the will of a campus' external vice president, it may institutionalize risk-aversion, and stigmatize stances on divisive or provocative items as triggers to loss of operating funds.

### Administrative Nightmare

UCSA's present system of funding depends heavily on a labor-intensive calculation, preparation, dissemination, collection, and pursuit of invoices to member associations who in turn must navigate their own campus processes.

UCSA's funding model is further complicated by the differences in campuses that pay dues from their association's operating budget (exacerbated further by association internal funding mechanisms) or running costly referenda that are subject to a number of other factors that have little to do with the effectiveness or general support of UCSA (e.g.: low voter turnout, administrative opposition, elections processes, etc.). Annually, a number of associations pester campus business offices, rush checks, or

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<sup>1</sup> Should legal opinion determine the UC's return-to-aid policy is only applicable to mandatory fees, the proposed amount will be rolled back to four dollars per academic year.

even write personal checks to fulfill dues to await reimbursement; as per UCSA's Bylaws, the delay in payment of dues can jeopardize the voting membership status of associations).

#### Budget Unpredictability

Unpredictable membership guarantees an unpredictable budget. UCSA is subject to the impact of an addition of new member associations (and thus an increase to the budget), as well as the withdrawal of an association has the potential to jeopardize operations, sometimes necessitating the termination of staff or other measures to close deficits. Given that the current Board agrees that our present skeletal staffing level is placing an enormous strain on effective operations, the model supports the need to stabilize the working budgets through a more stable revenue approach.

#### Free Rider

UCSA represents all students whether their association pays dues or not. Associations not presently members of UCSA still benefit from our continuous advocacy work on for example, tuition, despite the fact they are not contributing to staff support, student travel to UCOP to discuss policy matters, or organizing and executing conferences that prepare students to further advocate on behalf of the system. The ability to opt out of membership dues but still receive a majority of the benefits categorizes non-member associations as "free riders."

#### Dues from Graduate/Professional Member Associations

There is currently no difference between the minimum membership dues for undergraduate and graduate/professional students. As graduate/professional association budgets are generally much smaller than those of their undergraduate counterparts, the former lack the economy of scale to manage membership dues without it disproportionately impacting their budgets. This inequity is a factor in a graduate/professional association's ability to belong to UCSA.

#### Unequal Level of Dues

Presently, only three associations pay above the minimum per student assessment of \$1.30; some include payment for summer terms while all other member associations pay the minimum. Thence, some students are paying more into UCSA and so bear a greater share of the burden to keep the association afloat and able to meet its obligations. Table 2 shows that we depend on the charity of campuses that contribute above the minimum. However, the minimum standard is flawed: even assuming all associations paid the minimum of \$1.30 per academic year, our annual operating budget would be nearly halved.

#### Restraints on Staff Retention

While the UCSA Board of Directors is vested with full decision-making capacity to steer the organization's agenda, the day-to-day work of operating and maintaining the institution is done by staff. With a yearly turnover that brings new faces to the Board every summer, the effectiveness for staff to serve as custodians of institutional memory and tap into those histories as issues arise has a noticeable impact on the Board's capacity.

Staff turnover remains a serious issue within UCSA. In the last few years, staff tenure has averaged less than two years. A number of staff evaluations and exit interviews point to our budget limitations in providing market rate compensation, inability to fund professional development opportunities, and more staff to handle the demanding workload. As of November 2015, only two staff members have a work history with UCSA of over two years.

## Dues Stagnation and Budget Growth

As UCSA's current model is based on a finite number of campus associations, enrollment guarantees our budget ceiling remains largely fixed, while operational costs and student expectations continue to increase. This means that increasing costs occupy a growing portion of our budget with no increases of revenues to offset those expenses. Regularly adjusting our revenues ensures we are able to continue to fund expenditures that are increasing due to inflation and keep budget limitations from jeopardizing operations.

## **Potential Benefits of Proposal**

### Streamlining of Administrative Coordination

Changing our primary funding model relieves associations from the pressure of coordinating the financing of membership through referenda, which may be subject to campus politics or austere operating budgets. The latter often relegates UCSA membership to another line item in an association's budget that poses an annual crisis in whether or not a campus decides to prioritize funding for UCSA membership.

Under this proposal, UCOP would collect SAGE revenues at the time of registration as it does with other system fees and appropriate the total to UCSA in the same manner as CCCCO<sup>2</sup> and CSUOC<sup>3</sup> do for SSCCC and CSSA, respectively.

### Stabilization of Membership

As UCSA represents all UC students whether their association pays dues or not, eliminating the "middleperson" and collecting dues from students directly would remove free rider status and disincentivize opting out. Further, the administrative coordination the payment of membership dues is removed as an obstacle, streamlining the administration of SAGE at the system level. This simplifies the sending of representatives to UCSA Board to a simple question of whether or not to take advantage of a resource for which an association, albeit indirectly, is now already paying.

### Stabilization of the Budget

As UC enrollment numbers are largely stable, so too would be the revenues generated by a per-student fee. With consistent revenue forecasts, we can build a better budget that supports operations without the disruption of sudden withdrawals by member associations that precipitate the reduction of program support, staff salary stagnation, and even their termination to close budget deficits. Campuses with a history of contributing dues at levels exceeding the minimum can no longer threaten to roll back payment, or be tied to an abnormally high level, which increases equity among campuses at the table.

### Alignment with CSSA and SSCCC

In September 2013, Governor Brown signed AB 1358, allowing SSCCC the authority to pass Student Representation Fee (SRF) referenda on local campuses for the purpose of collecting a dollar for funding operations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=edc&group=76001-77000&file=76060-76067>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.calstate.edu/budget/student-fees/fee-policy/categories.shtml#c1>

<sup>4</sup> [http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201320140AB1358](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB1358)

In January 2015, the CSU Board of Trustees authorized the implementation of CSSA's SIRF<sup>5</sup>, leaving UCSA as the only organization in California and one of the few in the nation dependent on the charity of member associations to meet its budgetary obligations.<sup>6</sup> As the UC is independent of legislative control, the authority to collect this first fee of its kind would need to be granted, likely through amending Regent Policy 3302<sup>7</sup>, rather than seek a statutory change as SSCCC and CSSA were required to do in the forms of AB 1358 and AB 2736<sup>8</sup>, respectively.

#### Giving Back to Students

The UC's return-to-aid policy requires one-third of all mandatory system fees to be returned in the form of financial aid. As such a fee, a SAGE at six dollars per academic year would have the added benefit of generating nearly half a million dollars (\$472,626) system-wide in aid.<sup>9</sup>

## Suggested Uses of Additional Revenue

#### Improving Student Representation in Statewide Affairs

Students are a powerful voice in the Capitol, and UCSA seeks to facilitate grassroots advocacy to our elected officials as frequently as is necessary, but current funding uncertainties, limits the amount of travel support UCSA can allocate to bring students to Sacramento and Washington D.C. A better revenue stream would increase the opportunities to underwrite student advocacy travel.

Additionally, UCSA seeks to do a better job marketing the many opportunities for students to participate in the shared governance of the UC, including, but not limited to systemwide committee membership, the Student Observer, and StARs programs. A better funding stream would allow for more overt advertising of these opportunities, well beyond hoping that external vice presidents will push the information out to their campuses. As the Student Regent application process has benefited from direct, planned recruitment, so would UCSA then be able to fulfill our role as stewards of key programs that should be promoted to all students.

#### Funding Appointed Officers Proposal

At the January 2015 Board meeting, the UCSA Board expressed a concern that the development of coalition partners was absent of any staff or executive assignment; further, there are no staff or executives with the purview of specific policy matters such as campus climate or financial aid.

Conversely, SSCCC designates student representatives to a broad spectrum of shared governance committees with extensive jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup> As well, CSSA maintains an officer roster with portfolios including social justice and equality, technology, sustainability, financial aid, lobbying, and relations with alumni and faculty.<sup>11</sup> In both our sister organizations, these positions are open to any student in

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.csustudents.org/index.php/our-priorities/sirf/>

<sup>6</sup>

<http://www.csustudents.org/wp-content/uploads/news-and-media/pdf/SIRF-Funding-Stabilized-for-CSU-Student-Leadership-and-Advocacy.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/3302.html>

<sup>8</sup> [http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201320140AB2736](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB2736)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dailycal.org/2012/06/06/uc-regents-discuss-possibility-of-redirecting-return-to-aid-funds/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://studentsenateccc.org/Portals/1/Shared%20Governance%20and%20External%20Representatives%20Roster.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.csustudents.org/index.php/who-we-are/officers/>

the system, greatly expanding opportunities for student engagement beyond the numbers of their respective governing boards.

UCSA Board members are already responsible for governing the statewide organization as well as campus and personal obligations. With 238,700 students in the system, it is prudent to open positions in areas that have received little attention from UCSA in the past and fund the participation of those officers with SAGE revenues. A suggested roster is included in Table 3.

#### Expanding the Conference Schedule

UCSA conferences provide an invaluable opportunity to develop student advocacy skills, which in turn supports the work of UCSA in the field. Our present conference schedule consists of Congress in August, the Students of Color Conference in November, and the Student Lobby Conference in April. With an increase in revenue, UCSA can secure enough additional financial and human resources to expand our conference schedule into new areas such as a symposium for graduate/professional students, a Students of Color Conference in the spring, or ramp up our contributions to supporting existing conferences like Women of Color Conference and United States Student Association Legislative Conference.

Additionally, increased and stable revenue would allow UCSA to provide scholarships to delegates to ensure that students who wish to attend may do so.

#### Increasing Accessibility to, and Effectiveness of, UCSA Programs

Improving revenue to UCSA would allow the organization to support more student advocacy travel and provide additional training opportunities. Core to UCSA's mission is providing professional development opportunities for student leaders; a more stable revenue stream would allow for development of an annual curriculum designed to educate and elevate student leadership. Additionally, UCSA seeks to institutionalize an internship program that would provide meaningful learning opportunities for students.

In regards to one UCSA's core programs, improved revenue expectations would allow UCSA to better support voter registration and Get Out The Vote (GOTV) activities, with, for example, more paid stipends for vote coordinators, underwriting town halls and information nights and supplies for more volunteers.

#### Recognizing Student Accomplishments

UCSA would also like to establish a suite of student awards and scholarships; a more predictable funding stream would facilitate this.

#### Improvements to Staffing

Additional revenue would allow UCSA to offer salaries closer to market rates, with the desired outcome of improved staff retention, institutional continuity, and core competence over time.

Additionally, UCSA must attend to professional development opportunities to ensure staff are learning best practices and improving their skill set on a regular basis. Studies cite professional development opportunities as a key method of curbing turnover; this requires financial resources beyond the reach of the association's current budget.

Furthermore, there are deficiencies in staff capacity. In 2013-14, two staff positions, the University Affairs Director and Administrative Assistant, were eliminated, and the responsibilities were redistributed to existing staff. While the essential functions of these positions are covered, there is still a shortfall in the effective execution of duties. Current funding levels preclude the addition of staff, while even a small increase would allow the addition of paid internships to support legislative, fundraising, and operational capacity.

#### Bringing Tech Presence into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

To put it simply: our tech presence could use some work. Current budget constraints do not allow for a professional web and social media presence. By contrast, the Associated Students of the University of California, Davis maintain a widely renowned budget website that utilizes modern technology to inform, and in turn reinforce confidence of, campus constituents.<sup>12</sup> Better financial support would also allow for a much-needed modernization of staff computers, telecommunications resources, and data storage.

SSCCC maintains an extensive listserv network of nearly one thousand students, providing for instant access to constituents with the click of a button;<sup>13</sup> CSSA runs a student forum Facebook group that functions in a similar manner.<sup>14</sup> UCSA instead relies on the filtering down of communications from Board representatives as well as one-way messaging from our various social media accounts. While UCSA maintains a listserv of over 30,000 unqualified names, the list itself needs time and effort to bring into regular use. We accomplish extraordinary milestones for our constituents; we owe it to ourselves to share in those victories with the people in whose name we do this work.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://asucd.ucdavis.edu/resources/government-documents/asucd-budget>

<sup>13</sup> <http://listserv.cccnext.net/scripts/wa.exe?SUBED1=STUDENTSENATE&A=1>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/40472222911099/>

**Table 1: Hypothetical Fee Schedule**

Percentage of Students Contributing (Number of Students)				
Fee Level <sup>15</sup>	25% (59,675)	50% (119,350)	75% (179,025)	100% (238,700) <sup>16</sup>
\$1.30 (.87¢)	\$51,976.93	\$103,953.85	\$155,930.78	\$207,907.70
\$1.94 (\$1.30)	\$77,565.57	\$155,131.13	\$232,696.70	\$310,262.26
\$2.60 (\$1.74)	\$103,953.85	\$207,907.70	\$311,861.55	\$415,815.40
\$3.88 (\$2.60)	\$155,131.13	\$310,262.26	\$465,393.39	\$620,524.52
\$6.00 (\$4.02)	<b>\$239,893.50</b>	<b>\$479,787.00</b>	<b>\$719,680.50</b>	<b>\$959,574.00</b>

<sup>15</sup> Per UC policy, one-third of all fees are designated as “return-to-aid”, thus UCSA would only receive two-thirds of the total revenue.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/sites/default/files/uc\\_at\\_a\\_glance\\_011615.pdf](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/sites/default/files/uc_at_a_glance_011615.pdf)

**Table 2: Campus Contributions under SAGE**

Campus	Total Students <sup>17</sup>	Present Annual Revenue (\$1.30)	Projected Annual Revenue (\$4.02 at 75% Contribution)	Projected Annual Revenue (\$4.02 at 100% Contribution)
Berkeley	36,204	\$47,065.20	\$97,511.85	\$145,540.08
Davis	34,155	\$44,401.50	\$91,993.08	\$137,303.10
Irvine	29,588	\$38,464.40	\$79,692.32	\$118,943.76
Los Angeles	42,190	\$54,847.00	\$113,634.55	\$169,603.80
Merced	6,195	\$8,053.50	\$16,685.61	\$24,903.90
Riverside	21,297	\$27,686.10	\$57,361.34	\$85,613.94
San Diego	30,310	\$39,403.00	\$81,636.95	\$121,846.20
San Francisco	4,759	\$6,186.70	\$12,817.89	\$19,131.18
Santa Barbara	22,225	\$28,892.50	\$59,860.82	\$89,344.50
Santa Cruz	17,203	\$22,363.90	\$46,334.56	\$69,156.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>244,126</b>	<b>\$317,363.80</b>	<b>\$657,528.97</b>	<b>\$981,386.52</b>

**Table 3: UCSA Appointed Officers Roster**

Academic Affairs	Financial Aid Advocacy
Alumni Relations	Labor Relations
Campus Climate	Non-Traditional Student
Environmental Sustainability	

<sup>17</sup> <http://legacy-its.ucop.edu/uwnews/stat/statsum/fall2013/statsumm2013.pdf>

**Table 4: Timeline for Implementation**

<b>April 2015</b>	UCSA Board reviews proposal
<b>Spring 2015</b>	UCSA Board considers revisions to proposal
<b>August 2015</b>	SAGE Town Hall at Congress; solicit final feedback from students
<b>Fall 2015</b>	SAGE Presentations to student governments
<b>October 2015</b>	UCSA aligns fiscal year with UC to facilitate SAGE disbursement
<b>November 2015</b>	SAGE presentation at Students of Color Conference
<b>March 2015</b>	Proposal submitted to UC Regents for consideration
<b>Spring 2016</b>	Referenda on campuses to facilitate implementation of SAGE
<b>July 2016</b>	Beginning of UC/UCSA fiscal year
<b>Summer 2016</b>	Proposal submitted to UC Regents for adoption
<b>August/October 2016</b>	First collection of SAGE revenues at fall registration

**Table 5: Acronym Index**

<b>AB</b>	Assembly Bill
<b>CCC</b>	California Community Colleges
<b>CCCCO</b>	California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
<b>CSSA</b>	California State Student Association
<b>CSU</b>	California State University
<b>CSUOC</b>	California State University Office of the Chancellor
<b>SAGE</b>	Student Advocacy, Governance, and Engagement Fee
<b>SIRF</b>	Student Involvement and Representation Fee (CSSA)
<b>SRF</b>	Student Representation Fee (SSCCC)
<b>SSCCC</b>	Student Senate for California Community Colleges
<b>StARs</b>	Student Advocates to the Regents
<b>UC</b>	University of California
<b>UCOP</b>	University of California Office of the President
<b>UCSA</b>	University of California Student Association