



University of California Student Association
1020 12th St., Suite #232
Sacramento, CA 95814
510-834-8272 | www.ucsa.org

June 1, 2020

President Janet Napolitano
President, University of California
1111 Franklin St., 12th floor
Oakland, CA 94607

Chair John Pérez
Chair, UC Board of Regents
1111 Franklin St., 12th floor
Oakland, CA 94607

Dr. Kum-Kum Bhavnani
Chair, Academic Senate
1111 Franklin St., 12th floor
Oakland, CA 94607

Re: Urgent request to modify undergraduate instruction in light of current events

Dear President Napolitano, Chair Pérez, and Faculty Representative Bhavnani:

I write to request that the University of California and Academic Senate take immediate, systemwide action to reduce students' academic workload in light of the major, unprecedented combined stressors that UC students are currently experiencing.

First and foremost, Black students and their families are experiencing an unimaginable and indescribable amount of pain, sorrow, and anger following the unjust killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others. In addition, these students' social media accounts are likely flooded with graphic, triggering images and videos of police brutality. We want to be as clear as possible: It is nothing short of inhumane to expect Black students to turn in assignments and prepare for finals as if their education occurs in a vacuum.

In addition, many students and families are living in communities with significant police and National Guard presence. This can trigger immense fear and anxiety among students, especially those who are Black, Brown, Native, and/or undocumented. These students cannot be asked to focus on their classes when their community is being militarized.

Finally, COVID-19 is still devastating California's most vulnerable populations, especially in the Los Angeles area. Without a therapeutic or vaccine, and with all the challenges that online learning presents, students cannot be expected to study as they normally would.

With these challenges in mind, we make the following three urgent requests:



1. All undergraduate campuses on the quarter system should adopt a default Pass/No Pass grading system—one that allows students to still make progress toward major declaration and timely graduation—for Spring 2020. The adoption of this system at UC Berkeley significantly reduced stress toward the end of the semester. Given that students across UC are now facing even more significant challenges, we urge you to make this a systemwide policy.
2. All faculty members and instructors should be encouraged to grade as leniently as possible. Students may still opt for a letter grade for one reason or another—including for scholarships or for graduate school—so it is critical that students are given as much leeway as possible. Many faculty members and instructors have decided to provide this leeway on their own, but they should receive systemwide guidance so that students are not treated differently depending on which class they enroll in.
3. All faculty members and instructors should be encouraged to modify their finals to make them significantly less burdensome to prepare for, including by making them optional or eliminating them entirely. Students cannot be expected to prepare for rigorous, comprehensive finals at this time. Again, many faculty members and instructors have done this on their own, but systemwide consistency is crucial.

We understand that the University's standard practice is to provide maximum flexibility to faculty and instructors. But in times like these, this decentralized approach to academics will leave our most marginalized students behind. We cannot cling to standard policies and procedures when they do not provide our students with the compassion and understanding that is so desperately needed in these unprecedented times.

Years from now, students will remember how the University handled this moment. The academic business of this university is not more important than the wellbeing of marginalized students. The UC must take swift action to ensure that its rigorous curriculum does not become a barrier to students already under immense pressure and in a time of significant grief.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Varsha Sarveshwar".

VARSHA SARVESHWAR
President



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CC: Hayley Weddle, Student Regent
Jamaal Muwakkil, Student Regent-Designate
Anne Shaw, Secretary and Chief of Staff to the Board of Regents