

For Immediate Release
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UC's Student Employees Nix Proposed Union Contract, Campaign for 'No' Vote

University of California academic student employees (ASEs) are urging fellow rank-and-file union members to reject a tentative agreement between their union, UAW Local 2865, and the UC administration. ASEs include the graduate student instructors who work as teaching assistants for many of the undergraduate courses on the UC's ten campuses, as well as graduate student researchers and tutors.

Student employees calling for a no vote say they oppose the proposed contract because it further weakens undergraduate instruction at a time when budget cuts have taken a toll on public education.

“Student employees carry out the university’s core mission of undergraduate education. But while we are given loose change, over \$11 million will be spent just this year for incentive pay to a group of about 200 executives¹,” noted Brian Riley, Chair of the UC Davis Graduate Student Association. “That’s enough money to cover small wage increases for 12,000 student employees over the next three years, but we’re told the money isn’t there,” Riley added. “This just shows where the priorities of the Regents are, and it is not in undergraduate instruction.”

Student employees point out they make less than their peers at other universities around the country and have not seen a wage increase since 2008. Students also note that wage offers in the proposed contract are below some projections for inflation rates, potentially making them wage cuts in real (inflation-adjusted) terms. The contract also failed to deliver on student demands for an adequate child-care subsidy and protection against cuts to teaching assistant positions.

“To be blunt, this is a sell-out contract,” said Jennifer Tucker, a graduate student in City and Regional Planning who has been organizing to defeat the contract. “The strength of our union is not reflected in the weak terms offered in this contract.”

Opposition to the tentative contract has grown steadily since it was sent to members for consideration last week. Over 650 student union members have signed a pledge to vote against the contract online at <http://www.ucstudents.org/voteno>.

¹ Website of Senator Leeland Yee, California State Senator http://dist08.casen.govoffice.com/index.asp?Type=B_PR&SEC={EFA496BC-EDC8-4E38-9CC7-68D37AC03DFF}&DE={742DDC1B-D73D-4B1E-A9687052D63A528C}

In an unprecedented move, both the Berkeley and Santa Cruz representatives on the UAW bargaining team refused to endorse the agreement, releasing a letter to union members also urging rejection of the contract.² This letter was signed by five of the bargaining team's eighteen campus representatives.

Union representatives who did sign the contract have argued that returning to bargaining could result in a worse contract, but regulations against regressive bargaining make that a near impossibility.

“The idea that we have to vote for a bad contract because it's the best we can get is just a scare tactic,” said Cheryl Deutsch a UC Irvine Anthropology graduate student. “Frankly, it couldn't get much worse than a wage cut, so I don't see any other choice than to vote no next week.”

² An Open Letter to Members of UAW Local 2865 from five members of the UAW bargaining team from UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, and UC Irvine, <http://berkeleyuaw.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/why-you-should-vote-no.pdf>