

# Support for UC Santa Cruz strike spreads to other campuses, faculty

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Support for striking University of California (UC) Santa Cruz graduate students continues to grow as UC administration deploys police and threats across the UC system. UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) faculty passed two resolutions in support of the strike while graduate students held sympathy demonstrations at at least five other UC campuses. Democratic Party politicians, most notably presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, are now posturing as supporters of the strike in an attempt to channel it into harmless political channels.

200 UCSC students have been withholding Fall 2019 final grades since December, calling for a substantial cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) of \$1,412 per month to compensate for high rents. Last week, this grading strike grew into a full-blown wildcat strike, in defiance of the no-strike clause in the contract negotiated by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union.

This afternoon at 4:30 p.m., UCSC students will hold a general assembly to decide whether to risk dismissal or even deportation by defying the 11:59 p.m. ultimatum set by UC administration to submit Fall 2019 final grades.

International students issued a brave response to the university's thinly veiled threats of deportation, correctly noting, "We have no reason to believe that submitting grades and ending our strike activities will keep any of us safe from retaliation."

The heavy-handed response of UC administration, led by UC President and former Obama administration Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, has led to a nationwide outpouring of support.

Graduate students and supporters held solidarity demonstrations and teach-ins at at least four other UC campuses. At UC Davis, roughly 200 attended a teach-in on the UCSC strike. At UC San Diego, 60 to 70 students, including graduate and undergraduate

students, denounced Napolitano for threatening to fire students and attempting to divide them from faculty. One organizer noted the class gulf that separates graduate students from administrators, asking "When's the last time UC administrators had sleep for dinner?"

At UC Irvine, a few dozen student demonstrators confronted police outside an administration building, chanting "Cops off campus. COLA in my bank account." Students at UC Berkeley met Wednesday evening to discuss a response to potential victimization of UCSC students, with about 25 geography graduate students signing one of several open letters of support for the strike. Graduate students from NYU and University of Chicago have also issued statements of support via social media.

Significantly, the UCSC Faculty Senate voted Wednesday in favor of two pro-strike resolutions, according to the UCSC strike website. "The first calls for the removal and erasure of data from the form used to surveil faculty." This refers to an online form used by UCSC administration in an attempt to determine which graduate students were participating in the strike. The second resolution "is in support of higher grad wages, the withdrawal of sanctions/discipline from striking student's records, and ensuring departmental autonomy in hiring TAs, while advocating for a meaningful resolution to the strike."

Amid this genuine upswell of support, which, as social media postings demonstrate, extends far beyond the universities, Democratic Party politicians and trade union functionaries are posturing as defenders of the strike. The university-level UAW leadership at other campuses, which has refused to call out any members in a sympathy strike, now presents itself as the leadership of the COLA movement at UC Berkeley and UCSD. That said, Democratic Socialists of America

(DSA)-aligned *Jacobin* magazine and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have remained silent on the past two weeks' developments at UCSC.

Most notably, US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who occasionally still refers to himself as a democratic socialist, posted the following tweet Wednesday night, "UCSC grad students are fighting to have their labor rights acknowledged. I strongly urge the president of the UC system to stop threatening them, especially immigrant students, for organizing. I stand with @payusmoreucsc "

This tweet, now prominently featured on the UCSC strike website, illustrates some of the political dangers facing the strike. Sanders knows full well that providing a decent standard of living for graduate students, or the universal free education he claims to support, will require significant inroads on the wealth and privileges of the "billionaire class" and cuts to the gargantuan US military budget.

However, Sanders has made clear in his recent statements that he will happily support whoever becomes the Democratic nominee, even billionaire Michael Bloomberg who is attempting to buy the US presidency. In response to a questionnaire Sanders told the *New York Times* he would consider perpetrating war crimes such as pre-emptive war with Iran or North Korea and drone assassinations without due process. He has repeatedly expressed his opposition to immigrants and blamed them for driving down wages in the US.

A Reddit Ask Me Anything (AMA) comment exchange illustrates the illusions held by strike leaders in the UAW. In response to a question asking whether strikers were picketing their ineffective union, WildcatterUCSC responded, "We are not picketing our own statewide union; however, the reason we began this wildcat strike in December is because we did feel let down by the other UC campuses in our UAW grad union." The comment continues to note that UCSC graduate students voted against the latest contract by 83 percent, although the contract passed by large margins at other UC campuses.

The entire UAW national leadership is neck deep in a corruption scandal for accepting bribes from auto companies in exchange for "negotiating" cuts to worker compensation. The federal investigation has so far resulted in 13 UAW officials, relatives and company executives being charged, with 11 convicted.

Many more are implicated in court documents and may be charged soon including former UAW President Gary Jones, his predecessor Dennis Williams, and his interim replacement Rory Gamble.

Graduate students should reject with contempt the overtures of the Democratic Party and the corrupt trade union apparatus. Advancing the strike requires rank-and-file committees, in irreconcilable opposition to the Democrats and Republicans, to make the broadest possible appeal to workers and youth across the country and internationally.

Graduate students should note that 14,000 Northern California Safeway workers recently cast a 95 percent strike authorization vote against unlivable wages and precarious conditions after their union kept them on the job for a year and a half after their contract expired. In order to break through the university's threats these broader layers of the working class must be mobilized in the defense of public education.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, is holding an emergency online meeting this Sunday, February 23, at 4 p.m. Pacific Time. The meeting will discuss an international socialist strategy for the UC strike. Visit <https://iysse.com/UCstrike/> for further details.



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