



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
UC-AFT

Contacts: Josh Brahinsky, Lecturer, UC Santa Cruz (609) 558-7470 (text first is best)
Crystal Chang Cohen, Lecturer, UC Berkeley (415) 961-7962

UC Administration Denies Teaching Faculty Basic Health and Safety in the Face of Covid-19

Lecturers seek safe working conditions and equipment to teach online
and ensure student success

Jillian Azevedo is a lecturer at UC Davis who, like many of her colleagues, is struggling to teach from home. Although she has asthma and one of her UC Davis coworkers has tested positive for COVID-19, Azevedo was recently told by administrators to return to work at her university office, a small, shared room in which safe social distancing would be impossible. Because of COVID-19, students now watch Azevedo and thousands of other UC lecturers as they teach from their kitchen tables and bedrooms.

Azevedo bought a new desk with her own funds, and then joined UC-AFT's bargaining session with UC administration last Thursday to demand ergonomically sound desks and strong internet connections for all lecturers that need them to teach effectively and safely from home. In response, UC negotiators told Azevedo to go to campus to hold her online classes, even though the equipment in her office is inadequate and driving to UC Davis would require her to cross county lines and disobey shelter-in-place requirements. Ironically, while refusing to supply better internet, UC negotiators expressed frustration that Azevedo kept disappearing from the Zoom call because of her weak internet connection.

UC administration recently acknowledged that lecturers, who teach over 30% of student credit hours, are crucial to the continued function of the university. Although UC announced a moratorium on spring layoffs for career employees, contingent teaching faculty hired on short-term, part-time contracts remain at risk of losing their jobs. UC management claims that the ["delivery of instruction is an essential university service"](#) but has not acknowledged the enormous challenges lecturers face from the virus.

With the health risks associated with COVID-19 and the sudden transition to online teaching, the precariousness of teaching faculty positions and livelihoods has become dire. Lecturers have experienced a vast increase in uncompensated work to redesign courses to bring them online. Many live in fear of mass layoffs and loss of health insurance in the coming months. UC-AFT, the union that represents UC lecturers and librarians, has been bargaining over the effects of the virus on their members, but the UC has thus far refused to take job insecurity and health and safety seriously.

UC Davis lecturer Katie Rodger has a new sign on the door of her backyard shed. It reads "Mom is teaching! Don't knock!" Rodger, a dedicated instructor, has been teaching in the University Writing Program for 10 years. In the last two weeks, she has transformed her wooden shed into an office she now shares with her husband. They take turns teaching and homeschooling their 9 and 12 year old children. "With Covid 19, the balancing act between parenting and work makes everything exponentially harder. I need to meet individually with my students to discuss their papers and now I juggle those along with feeding and homeschooling my kids," Rodger says. She also spent dozens of hours over spring break to redesign curriculum that once relied on close contact with and between students into courses that will work remotely -- if only for a quarter -- on Zoom. The university expects Rodger to pick up the tab for her home office and all that entails, and has refused to compensate her for this labor crucial to the continued success of her students.

Crystal Chang Cohen, a lecturer at UC Berkeley, is teaching three classes from her living room, a makeshift office that she shares with her partner, who also works full-time from home. "Teaching three classes from home with three young children running around is even more chaotic than when I was driving across three Bay Area bridges three times a week at the beginning of my career," says Chang Cohen. Like many of her lecturer colleagues, Chang Cohen has taught at several universities during the same term to stitch together a living.

Even before the virus outbreak, lecturers faced difficult working conditions. The median UC lecturer salary of \$19,900 means that many can barely afford to pay rent in high-cost areas. Approximately two thirds of lecturers are not eligible for UC health insurance. The turnover rate is as high as 45% per year on some campuses. As a result, UC students are often deprived of mentors who lose their jobs at the end of the term. UC-AFT is calling on UC management not to abandon students or their teaching faculty during this crisis.

UC-AFT leaders will be hosting a press conference on Friday April 10th at 10am. Here is a link to join the press conference: Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/215075534?pwd=cXJYUi85citaNUtzMXZMTFVpPVVpXZz09>

Meeting ID: 215 075 534

Password: 165564

University Council-American Federation of Teachers represents 7,000 librarians and non-tenure-track teaching faculty working throughout the University of California system. UC-AFT members hold academic appointments as lecturers, supervisors of teacher education, field work coordinators, and librarians. For more information about UC-AFT, go to ucaft.org.