



University of California Student Association
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December 2025

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Monique Limón
Senate President pro Tempore
1021 O St., Room 8518
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Robert Rivas
Speaker of the Assembly
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: 2026-27 UC Student Association State Budget Request for Consideration by Governor and the State Legislature to Strengthen Student Workforce Development & Basic Needs

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the University of California Student Association (UCSA), we write to share our state budget priorities for consideration in your January 2026 State Budget Proposal. Representing over 230,000 undergraduate UC students across nine campuses, we are hopeful that these fiscal requests to the state will advance our mission to advocate for the affordability, accessibility and quality of a UC education for countless current and future UC students and their families across California.

We respectfully request your support for these budget investments in the development of California's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-27 state budget, especially in service to the well-being and success of our students as they face rising tuition¹ and housing costs², and our campuses face mounting cost pressures from state budget shortfalls coupled with an extremist federal administration holding billions in grant funding hostage.

1. Supplement UC Workforce Development & Career Readiness for Underrepresented Students alongside SAPEP Programs in Alignment with the Governor's Master Plan for Career Education: \$5 Million One-Time

UCSA, through our Racial Justice Now (RJN) campaign, is requesting a one-time budget request of \$5 Million in One-Time General Fund support to expand UC Student Academic Preparation and Educational Partnership (SAPEP) programs to highlight a stronger focus on equitable access to career pathways and workforce development for students from low-income, first generation backgrounds and underserved communities.

Historically, UC SAPEP programs have supported the University with targeted recruitment and retention of California students through a diverse, widespread range of community outreach and academic support programs that bridge underserved student groups to and through their UC education. This includes campus-based programs like Early Academic Outreach (EAOP), Transfer Prep, Student Initiated Programs (SIPs) and systemwide programs like MESA, Puente, UC Scout and ArtsBridge, among many others.³

¹ <https://edsource.org/updates/uc-may-consider-more-tuition-increases-for-2027-28-school-year>

² <https://www.ppic.org/blog/room-and-board-are-making-college-less-affordable/>

³ <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/may23/a6attach3.pdf>



As these programs have produced incredible results to recruit and retain underrepresented students towards their UC degree, we recognize the increasing need for students across our campuses from underrepresented backgrounds to be better supported with critical career readiness skills-building through professional and workforce development opportunities while they are pursuing their education. UCSA knows that the Governor truly recognizes this need as well, with the incredible undertaking of the Master Plan for Career Education⁴ that has built the framework to prepare Californians for career-sustaining jobs by strengthening career pathways, promoting skills-building, facilitating workforce coordination and especially, ensuring equitable access. The need for funding a stronger focus on equitable workforce development and career pathway programs at the UC cannot be overstated more than now:

- First generation college graduates from UC earn on average \$35,000 approximately two years after graduation⁵, compared to \$36,400 for their non-first generation peers⁶—a gap that widens over time (roughly \$4,000 difference by year eight). Across campuses, Asian students have the highest graduation rates, often exceeding 90%, followed by White students (mid-80s to 90%), while Latino and Black students graduate at lower but improving rates (typically 70–85%).⁷
- UC's career support infrastructure is less standardized across campuses, with campuses that have larger underrepresented populations having **fewer** robust alumni or employer pipelines, compared to their more-resourced peers. UC Berkeley has a strong support program which includes employer information sessions⁸, alumni scholars programs, and alumni networking tools that last up to 5 years after graduation.⁹ Other campuses limit alumni support to one year post graduation¹⁰, with fewer structured mentorship programs outside of traditional services such as resume workshops, career fairs, and access to platforms such as Handshake.¹¹
- Despite UC graduates having an average starting salary of \$50,000–\$60,000, and earnings rising to \$78,000 ten years post-graduation, students are continuing to face barriers navigating the competitive labor market and securing full-time employment within the first year.¹² For example, UC alumni in social science fields two years after graduation earn a yearly salary of approximately \$45,000, while engineering or computer science graduates earn a starting salary of \$86,000.¹³ A UCOP study shows that even working in similar industries after attaining similar majors, female Latinx and African American graduates earn less than their white and Asian counterparts.¹⁴

UCSA's equity-centered mission prompts us to request a budget allocation for career readiness and workforce development alongside UC SAPEP programs because of their inherent focus on supporting students from low-income, first generation backgrounds and underrepresented communities. UC must leverage a model like SAPEP to engage in partnerships with our campus Career Centers and workforce partners in our local communities and enhance existing UC programs

⁴ <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-CA-Master-Plan-for-Career-Education.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/climb-mobility-analysis>

⁶ https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/personal-economic-value-of-a-uc-degree.pdf

⁷ <https://datausa.io/search?q=&dimension=University>

⁸ <https://career.berkeley.edu/alumni/alumni-eligibility/>

⁹ <https://alumni.berkeley.edu/give-back/scholarships#volunteer>

¹⁰ <https://alumni.ucr.edu/new-grad>

¹¹ <https://careers.ucr.edu/alumni#alumni-servicefluctuating>

¹² <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/uc-alumni-earnings>

¹³ <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/uc-alumni-work>

¹⁴ https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/uc-alumni-gender-equity-pay-gap.pdf



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towards career pathway focuses where students from diverse backgrounds are enriched to have a career plan alongside workforce development opportunities while they are studying at a UC. We look forward to working with the Governor, Legislature and the UC to make this possible and increase career attainment for thousands of UC graduates into California's workforce.

2. Emergency Basic Needs Funding to Address Pressing Need for Students' Food, Housing, and Support Service Insecurities: \$20 Million One-Time

UCSA has worked for decades to secure robust holistic support for students through comprehensive financial aid reform, increased academic resources and student services, and basic needs. In 2019, UCSA and our student and basic needs communities were immensely grateful to the Legislature for appropriating \$15 Million in General Fund to address student basic needs across California's public university systems. With this increased capacity to staff UC basic needs centers and deploy case management for thousands of students into CalFresh assistance, housing services, and financial aid guidance, we have witnessed immense progress to improve student outcomes while ensuring our campuses have adequate infrastructure and frameworks to address our students' total cost of attendance. Additionally, in 2023 the state approved a \$1.5 Million ongoing allocation for UC disability services, with an additional \$8 Million in one-time funding for implementation of disability service recommendations.¹⁵ While deeply appreciated, funding has not kept up with UC campus enrollment growth¹⁶, inflation and cost of living expenses as each of these have continued to rise exponentially.

Over half of UC undergraduates have their tuition covered,¹⁷ but as a result of the incredibly alarming rise in costs across the state and country, especially when it comes to student housing,¹⁸ students attending our institutions are increasingly facing a multitude of insecurities when it comes to basic needs. Last year, our ACQUIRE campaign sought to expand institutional food assistance programs for low-income and vulnerable undocumented and international students, but after intentional consultation with students and basic needs experts, and alarming service gaps revealed coupled with cuts to SNAP in the federal budget bill, UCSA is **urgently requesting a \$20 Million One-Time** appropriation for **Emergency Basic Needs Funding** in order to adequately address students' food and housing insecurity and pressing support service needs for Basic Needs Centers and Disability Service Programs.

In order to effectively support our campuses with the resources to ensure students' food, housing and disability service needs are met, we must recognize the immense pressures that our campus basic needs centers and disability service programs have faced since the initial 2019 basic needs appropriation was made by the state. **A new \$20 Million One-Time budget request for emergency basic needs funding is essential in order to subsidize staffing for UC campus Basic Needs Centers and Disability Service Programs**, which will enhance student success through improving staff capacity and ability to support students struggling with CalFresh applications after new federal restrictions and pending guidance, in addition to better disability accommodations where students face pervasive wait times for support. We also request state funding to be appropriated for

¹⁵ <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/mar25/a2.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/university-california-announces-record-breaking-enrollment>

¹⁷

<https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/tuition-financial-aid/#:~:text=UC's%20financial%20aid%20program%20supports%20students%20in,receive%20enough%20financial%20aid%20to%20cover%20tuition>

¹⁸ <https://www.berkadia.com/lp/2025-berkadia-us-student-housing-market-report/>



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emergency grants disbursed by basic needs centers for students with precarious, emergency situations relating to housing insecurity or unexpected financial burdens.

With these three critical issues addressed in a state budget allocation, UC student services would be able to address alarming equity gaps facing students with basic needs insecurities:

- ❖ In 2023-2024, over half of college students report having experienced one form of basic need insecurity.¹⁹ Furthermore 48% of College students report housing insecurity, 14% report homelessness, 67% of parenting students experience housing insecurity, 60% of Black students experience housing insecurity, and 72% of former foster youth experience housing insecurity. 62% of students with disabilities experience basic needs insecurity, including food and housing, 13% higher than students who don't.
- ❖ Median rents across UC campuses highlight the affordability pressure students face: Berkeley (\$2,500/mo), Davis (\$2,150), Irvine (\$4,900), Los Angeles (\$2,685), Merced (\$1,850), Riverside (\$2,251), San Diego (\$2,853); University City/La Jolla (\$3,170), Santa Barbara (\$3,995), and Santa Cruz (\$3,400). At these price points, housing alone can consume the majority of a student's budget before accounting for food, transportation, books, and health expenses.²⁰
- ❖ According to the University of California's Basic Needs Annual Report,²¹ undergraduate students' rent increased 24% above inflation since 2019. Undergraduate students at the Merced campus reported the highest increase at 56%. Systemwide average monthly rent for undergraduates was \$1,341 in 2023.
- ❖ According to the California Student Aid Commission, student groups most likely to face food and housing insecurity are age 24 years or older, African American or Latino/Hispanic, students with dependents, California Community College transfers, and students with zero Expected Family Contribution (EFC), with 66% of students experienced food insecurity and 53% experienced housing insecurity.²²
- ❖ Academic impacts: 8% withdrew from courses and 13% reduced course loads due to food and housing costs. Zero-EFC students: 73% food insecure, 62% housing insecure. Student parents: 79% food insecure, 73% housing insecure. Older students (29+): 75% food insecure, 72% housing insecure. Additional disparities are observed among many students of color and independent students.
- ❖ In 2022-23, UC campuses awarded \$3,364,433 in emergency basic-needs aid to 2,995 students and delivered food support at scale: campus pantries served 27,657 students, food distribution sites served 14,335, 2,810 received meal vouchers, 4,088 received grocery gift cards, and 16,716 were served by CalFresh.
- ❖ UC's disabled student population is expanding, but the number of disability specialists have not kept up with this growth.²³

With the population of students enrolled at UC and across California's public higher education growing more diverse, with the largest share of first generation, low-income and nontraditional, who are attending UC campuses in some of the highest cost regions of the state, addressing student basic needs and disability services through increased staff support and providing emergency housing insecurity grants is vital to ensure their academic success and well-being.

¹⁹ <https://hope.temple.edu/research/hope-center-basic-needs-survey/2023-2024-student-basic-needs-survey-report?ut>

²⁰ <https://www.zumper.com/rent-research>

²¹ <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/mar24/b3attach1.pdf>

²² https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/default/files/file-attachments/food_and_housing_basic_needs_survey_2023.pdf?ut

²³ <https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat/2023/05/university-of-california-disability/>



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Budget Request

- ❖ **\$5 Million One-Time General Fund** to Support Workforce Development and Career Readiness Programs for Underrepresented Students at the UC.
- ❖ **\$20 Million One-Time General Fund** to Supplement Emergency Basic Needs Support to Address Staff Shortages, Rising Student Housing Insecurity through Grants and Direct Emergency Aid, and Support Food Assistance Program and Disability Services Enrollment.

State Funding Precedents

- ❖ In 2022, the California State Budget appropriated **\$22.5 million in one-time General Fund support for Student Academic Preparation and Education Partnerships (SAPEP) programs** at the UC. The University was prompted to use this funding in their efforts to expand transfer support programs to community colleges in underserved regions across the state, especially to counter the decline in Community College student enrollment during COVID.²⁴
- ❖ In 2019, the state designated **\$15 Million in General Fund to the UC for Basic Needs**, in order to address student hunger and homelessness for students across California public universities homelessness.²⁵
- ❖ In 2023, the state approved **\$1.5 Million in new, ongoing funding for UC disability services**, matched by campuses with an additional \$8 Million in one-time funds to implement systemwide disability services recommendations.

Despite overwhelming evidence that a college degree increases nearly every aspect of an individual's life,²⁶ from stable healthcare that leads to longer lifespans, to higher incomes and greater job stability during economic downturn, the perception of the value of a college degree has continued to plummet across public opinion.²⁷

UCSA will continue to elevate student voices at the forefront of our advocacy, and we believe these two critical budget requests will ensure the essential needs of students attending our institutions of higher education are met, and contribute to a strong, competitive California workforce that has made us the 4th largest economy in the world. We respectfully request your support, and look forward to working with you, the Department of Finance and LAO, the Legislature, and our partners and students across the state to achieve a robust 2026-27 budget that reflects the values of our state.

Sincerely,

Aditi Hariharan | President
University of California Student Association (UCSA)

CC: Hon. Jesse Gabriel, Assembly Budget Committee Chair
Hon. John Laird, Senate Budget Committee Chair
Janet Reilly, Chair of the UC Board of Regents
James B. Milliken, President of the University of California

²⁴ <https://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-Illuminating-Innov-ExecSumm-FINAL.pdf>

²⁵

<https://abgt.assembly.ca.gov/sites/abgt.assembly.ca.gov/files/Highlights%20of%20Governors%20Proposed%202019%20Budget.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.ppic.org/publication/is-college-worth-it/>

²⁷ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/695003/perceived-importance-college-hits-new-low.aspx>