

January 20, 2021

Kim A. Wilcox
Chancellor
University of California, Riverside
4108 Hinderaker Hall, 900 University Ave
Riverside, CA 92521

Thomas Smith
Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor
University of California, Riverside
4148 Hinderaker Hall, 900 University Ave
Riverside, CA 92521

Re: Student Priorities for UC Riverside Campus Reopening

Dear Chancellor Wilcox and Provost Smith,

On behalf of the over 20 thousand undergraduate students across the University of California, Riverside campus community, we are writing to share our priorities for the administration and campus leadership to consider and address in our efforts to guide our students, staff and faculty towards a safe and accessible campus reopening. UC President Michael V. Drake recently announced on Monday, January 11 that the [University of California plans for fall 2021 in-person instruction across its 10 campuses](#), citing specific plans for resumption of fall classes, including additional safety measures and starting dates to be decided and announced by individual UC campuses as they coordinate with local public health agencies and continue to follow local and state health guidelines.

Campus leadership at UC Riverside has the opportunity to initiate a comprehensive approach towards an equity-driven COVID recovery while setting a strong example for our sister campuses, first by calling on its students leaders to envision the best direction to empower our learning environments on a campus that is desolate and lifeless without us. ASUCR has identified some key aspects for our proposed campus reopening plan set for fall 2021 that we feel need to be explored and carried out in order to secure this ambitious timeline with unwavering success:

Academic Continuity

In the early stages of the University's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was initial intent to implement a remote and in-person [hybrid instruction for Fall 2020, recommended by then-UC President Napolitano](#). We could have never imagined the prolonged extent of this crisis driving solely-remote instruction to last longer than an entire academic year, but ASUCR aims to identify a commitment from the University through its Academic Continuity Working Group and the UCR

Division of the Academic Senate to **allow for students in complicated or difficult situations to continue taking online or remote courses through the end of the fall quarter 2021 and beyond** as we phase back to campus. We also urge increased advocacy around **extending S/NC and withdrawal periods as well as grading leniency**, especially in cases where students have had their learning experience disrupted by factors that are out of their control.

It is up to our leaders to recognize and understand that the pandemic has disproportionately affected low-income, working class people of color across the country, [deepening already extensive disparities that exist](#). It is especially critical for UC Riverside to be bold in providing accommodations academically, whether our Highlanders are international students currently abroad navigating travel restrictions, or students that have been put in difficult economic circumstances at home, working to support family or coping with a lost loved one, and cannot immediately move back to campus by this fall.

COVID-19 Vaccine and Testing Accessibility

The crisis presented to our campus has impacted students in several ways beyond our educational experiences alone. With the public health of students being a priority for guiding the UCR Academic Continuity Working Group and other UC entities in responding to COVID, there is a compelling precedent for the campus to develop a strong commitment with local public health offices to **provide universal COVID-19 vaccinations for every student** prior to reopening in fall 2021. With the promise by incoming President Biden to [vaccinate 100 million Americans in 100 days](#), we hope to see the ambition to return to campus funneled into a widespread vaccine campaign that ensures every Highlander has equitable access. We also recommend the possible exploration of a **campus-wide mask mandate** through fall 2021 while working to have masks available through classes, resource centers and departments, **free on-campus and residential hall testing** locations, and **sensitive strategies in place to support isolation or quarantine periods** in response to any COVID cases or outbreaks on-campus or regionally in Riverside.

Student Health, Wellness and Basic Needs

Additionally, the pandemic has left so many feeling emotionally, physically and mentally altered. Measuring the effects of this period and how the virus has affected our peers lives' will take some time, so ASUCR requests the support of Campus Leadership to **establish a COVID-19 Impact Working Group** that will aim to foster an understanding of the situations students are struggling with in order to recommend administrative and community action that will successfully transition students back to in-person instruction rather than an immediate shift, and better highlight areas of improvement for campus resources that have adapted so well to online learning, yet now face another challenge of possibly serving students both remotely and physically.

We also hope that **Community Support Groups through resource centers and departments** can be initiated and hosted throughout the next two quarters, tasked with providing a safe space for students to share their experiences while also informing the working group with student narratives that can help to bridge the gap on identifying what students need most. The past 10 months has put a tremendous amount of pressure on Highlanders, especially for members of our

community who have lost a loved one, personally had COVID and fortunately recovered, or experienced a difficult hardship and seeks to cope with others who might share these experiences.

ASUCR was proud to sponsor **grocery card distributions** through the Well last Spring, and we would like to explore continuing critical opportunities like this for students to access their basic needs, while also looking to **expand services like the R'Pantry, CalFresh, Basic Needs, the Well, CAPS and other essential groups** that sustain our student body. Mental health and food security are priorities that Campus Leadership can **hold themselves accountable to through the guidance of a diverse coalition of prostaff, student leaders and organizations** working to help UCR students, secure additional state and institutional funding, and promote educational success by ensuring their basic needs are met.

Housing at UC Riverside has increasingly become an issue, especially over the course of the COVID-response and students [trying to navigate local municipalities and statewide eviction moratoriums](#). The framework for reopening campus housing must recognize the expanded enrollment of UC combined with social distancing guidelines and many other factors. For off-campus housing, ASUCR was appreciative of administration in **communicating nonprofit and legal resources around leases and contracts**, and we ask that this **method of transparency be centralized so that the Fair Housing Council and Riverside Legal Aid are support services that students can immediately identify** for issues they may run into. The issue of student-workers being put in unfair situations by their employers must also be revisited to **establish measures of accountability** such as in the case of our very own Resident Advisors (RAs) treatment by ResLife last September.

Address Concerns with Policing and Campus Safety

Last summer, the nation reckoned with and responded to an ugly truth that our police forces disproportionately target members of the Black community. We have witnessed this reality in action at UC Riverside and several other UC campuses more often than anything that would ever be acceptable. In response to student demands, Chancellor Wilcox, at the guidance of UCOP and the UC Board of Regents, created the UCR Campus Safety Task Force to identify and recommend further actions for the campus to address concerns brought before them. Two members of our Executive Cabinet have been fortunate to serve on the committee and contribute meaningfully to broad discussions about UCPD.

Before returning to campus where many students of color, especially Black students, may feel unsafe and at odds with their first in-person encounters with police ever since national outrage and protests in solidarity with Black lives unjustly facing police brutality, we highly recommend Campus Leadership to **immediately address any proposed changes to UCPD standards and long-term solutions including budget recommendations that have been identified by the Task Force**. Without full support by UCR leadership to promise substantial change through systemic reform, we are concerned that the issue of policing will continue to be revisited for years to come due to institutional inaction.

Overall, as the official undergraduate student voice, ASUCR remains optimistic for a campus reopening that elevates every student narrative so that Highlanders can be well-equipped to achieve the University of California's promise of attaining an accessible, affordable, quality education. We commend every single leader across the UCR campus community who adapted to the unprecedented challenges presented to us over the past year, especially in addressing the essential needs of the undergraduate student body through much needed academic accommodations, expanded access to basic needs and mental health services, campus and systemwide advocacy efforts, and measures to promote public health and wellness.

We are indebted to the student leaders, professional staff and faculty who care for students with so much passion, and look forward to our first steps back on campus soon. For further questions about our letter, please contact ASUCR President Luis Huerta at asucrpresident@ucr.edu.

Sincerely,

Luis Huerta

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