



UCLA Undergraduate Student Association Council (USAC)

To:

Gene Block, Chancellor
Emily Carter, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost
Michael Beck, Administrative Vice Chancellor
Monroe Gordon, Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs
Maria Blandizzi, Dean of Students
Patricia Turner, Dean and Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education
Michael Meranze, Chair of the Academic Senate
Shane White, Vice Chair/Chair-Elect of the Academic Senate
Joseph Bristow, Immediate Past Chair of the Academic Senate
April de Stefano, Executive Director of the Academic Senate

March 22, 2020

The Undergraduate Students Association Council (USAC), the official representative governing body for the 32,000 undergraduates enrolled at UCLA, is writing to express our enormous concern regarding the exacerbation of educational inequities in the upcoming spring quarter term. The USAC is troubled by the potential for educational inequities, which severely limit students' equal opportunity at UCLA, and has therefore brought forth a series of demands to mitigate these concerns.

The UCLA community was made aware by Chancellor Gene Block via BruinPost and UCLA Newsroom's University News update¹ on Tuesday, March 10th that the University would be suspending in-person classes until April 10th, offering exams remotely, and encouraging students to start Spring Break from home.

The UCLA community was then made aware by Executive Vice Chancellor Emily Carter via BruinPost and UCLA Newsroom's University News update² on Friday, March 13th, that the University would be extending remote learning through the end of Spring Quarter.

In response to the concerning lack of communication to students and the various associated stressors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, USAC wrote a letter³ on March 15th to UCLA Administration and the Academic Senate urging flexibility in final examination formatting, distribution, and grading. This letter was derived directly from the experiences of students on campus, of which a significant portion provided testimonies⁴ on the hardships they are facing during this unprecedented time. While USAC was

¹ <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/ucla-transitions-to-online-instruction>

² <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/ucla-transitions-to-online-instruction>

³ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ypbpc7cCyxkYg5PTCTBhK8tyA-FnOACO-zP7K11c1CU/edit?usp=sharing>

⁴ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/10I1hOKSxKIASqRjvUAe8ZgOLz717NExlWehIgTmjrmM/edit#gid=452306>



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pleased to receive support from UCLA Administration and some faculty members, there was still pushback and noncompliance from other faculty members. The mixed results and nonuniformity of policies were disheartening, but not shocking. While the USAC fully understands the associated possible implications of academic freedom on these past and future demands, it is of utmost importance that all students are given an equitable opportunity for academic success.

This call for equity is growing more pressing day-by-day as new emergency policies are implemented and enforced across Los Angeles County, the State of California⁵, and the United States. In Los Angeles County, residents have been ordered to remain indoors, practice social distancing, and only leave the house to gather essential items (food, medicine, etc.). Additionally, only workers in “essential jobs” are being permitted to travel to work, while the remainder of employed persons have been asked to work from home, or have lost employment altogether.⁶

As students resume classes for spring quarter, they face additional and unprecedented inequities that prevent fair competition in academics. An “opt in” grading route, which would allow students a surface-level “choice” between letter-grading or Pass/No Record (P/NR) grading, discriminates against students who are most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A distinction between a P/NR and a letter grade fosters stigma around “choosing” P/NR. When employers or graduate schools compare students, students who chose the P/NR option could be perceived as less deserving of the position than those who opted into receiving a letter grade. That stigma will inevitably fall on lines of socioeconomic status, ability, race, sexual orientation, and documentation status. Students without internet access, stable housing, or food security will be forced into the “choice” of P/NR because of their unique situation. Alternatively, students who don't have the access, resources, ability to prioritize their academic success during this crisis may feel pressured to display a letter grade that is not representative of their full potential, for fear of the stigma associated with P/NR. Moreover, without a universal P/NR system in place, impacted students will be forced to rely on the professor's leniency if they decide to pursue letter grading. This will further result in impacted students being penalized academically for circumstances beyond their own control.

Here are all the ways students have been, and will continue to be impacted:

- Income insecurity due to the ways the economy is impacting families and primary income providers as businesses close, unemployment increases, and people face unwarranted evictions.
- Income insecurity due to loss of wages and employment from the closing of facilities and alleviation of student worker hours.
- Inability to pay rent and being prevented from breaking leases in Westwood and surrounding neighborhoods.

⁵ <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/03/19/governor-gavin-newsom-issues-stay-at-home-order/>

⁶ https://www.lamayor.org/sites/g/files/wph446/f/article/files/SAFER_AT_HOME_ORDER2020.03.19.pdf



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- Decreased access to basic needs resources (food, toiletries, etc.) given recent merchandise shortages and restaurant closures.
- Recent travel bans impacting students travel to and from home and academic destinations.
- Moving out of current living conditions with little to no support or resources offered.
- Despair regarding the inability to be present on campus and participate in events that define campus life as part of the UCLA experience, especially in Spring quarter. Many student organizations and social circles look forward to and have been preparing for programming all year long, and have been completely distraught and disappointed that their student-led events, which were supposed to take place in the coming months, have been abruptly and indefinitely suspended with no support or consolation.
- Uncertainty regarding duration of quarantine and the mental health risks of social distancing.
- Looming anxiety over the abrupt adjustment to online instruction with the added stressor of the cut-off of known campus resources (i.e. mental health services, academic resources, mentorship, and more).
- Inability to be in an environment where they can focus on their studies due to difficult financial and familial circumstances
- For parenting students, the added responsibility of looking over and home-schooling their children to adapt to the new learning environment introduced by this pandemic
- Students with disabilities registered for accommodations through the Center for Accessible Education have been given no instruction as to how accommodations will be applied to the online format.

We understand that UCLA prides itself on being the number one public institution in the nation and has a longstanding academically rigorous repertoire that we as students are also proud to uphold and further. In a traditional academic setting, students would have the ability to adjust to circumstances and reach out for institutional support. But, as the COVID-19 pandemic worsens, and students continue to face exacerbated institutional barriers to education, it is clear that more needs to be done to account for these inequities that are destined to arise. Additionally, students, faculty, and administration alike have not experienced the full implications of the virus, but in the coming days, hundreds to thousands of additional students will be directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With these community conditions in mind, it is apparent that students will not be at their full capacity to achieve academic success. Marginalized students already face inequities in their education, and these additional barriers placed due to the conditions surrounding COVID-19 have exacerbated the inequities marginalized communities face. For UCLA to support its students, the Undergraduate Students Association Council is using our voice in direct response to student concerns to demand the University's administration, the Academic Senate, academic departments, and individual professors to comply with these recommendations:



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- **Implement UNIVERSAL Pass/No Record grading as the default setting for ALL classes with a mandatory transcript notation indicating this, along with an optional process to “unmask” (or, in other words, reveal) students’ letter grades on a course-by-course basis to be accounted toward their GPAs. To further the implementation of this policy, the following changes must accompany this action:**
 - A student may begin to “unmask” their grades beginning Week 6, and there should be no deadline to unmask grades, so as not to affect underclass students potentially applying to programs in the future;
 - Students subject to academic action, including but not limited to Academic Probation, Subject to Dismissal, and falling behind on Expected Cumulative Progress, shall not be 1) placed on these various standings based on academic performance from Spring 2020 and 2) students that were on these standings prior to Spring 2020 will not have Spring 2020 count as one of their quarters given to clear their Academic Action. (the College will not count Spring 2020 as a quarter where students subject to Academic Action can clear their Academic Action)
 - Allowing academic requirements (including for majors, minors, and general education) to be fulfilled with a passing grade for the duration of this policy.
- **The drop deadline shall be extended to the end of Week 10 of Spring Quarter.**
- **The mark of “Pass” shall be defined as a score of 60% or higher, and assign at least the average percentage of students who normally pass a course at UCLA in a typical quarter at UCLA with a passing grade so as to standardize a passing grade across the university.**
- **While professors maintain academic freedom in assigning grades to students, professors should be expected to maintain at most the same expectations as a typical quarter at UCLA and should not increase the difficulty of their courses, beyond the inherent difficulties of transitioning to an online platform.**
- **All online instruction to be recorded as to account for students who are unable to access scheduled instruction during particular time periods. This is especially true for international students, who may be located in countries which do not allow for the use of the Zoom video platform or are located in time zones where it is impossible to attend class during Pacific Standard Time.⁷**
- **For all final examinations to not be scheduled during certain time blocks as to allow for students who are unable to access such examinations to participate in courses.**
- **The extension of “spring break” by one week, resuming instruction on April 5th, thereby making instruction a 9-week term, as has been done at other quarter system institutions.⁸**

⁷ Zoom video software is banned in the following countries:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203806119-Will-Zoom-work-internationally->

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https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/mizzou-suspends-in-person-classes-washington-university-extends-spring-break/article_169fd357-bd8a-5723-9e5f-ddc3e259e742.html



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- **The University will send out an evaluation of professors during Week 5 of Spring 2020 so that students may send feedback directly to departments and administration about the quality of education they are receiving during this transition.**

Please note that the recommendation we provided is similar, but not identical, to that implemented by the Administration at the [University of Michigan](#) and the [University of California, Berkeley](#). As we enter Spring Break, we urge the administration to take immediate steps to implement these provisions to allow a smooth transition into Spring Quarter for all students, as other schools similar to our university have. Though great issues of inequity persist, UCLA administration and all faculty members should support these important steps to equitably address the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Under the current circumstances, it is imperative that UCLA faculty and administration take steps to equitably support students who will be detrimentally affected by COVID-19's spread throughout the

United States and the world. We urge that all members of our campus leadership show sensitivity to student concerns and immediately take steps to mediate the academic impact of our current challenge. Our council would be more than willing to discuss the implementation of these above steps.

In Solidarity,

UCLA Undergraduate Students Association Council

Robert Blake Watson, President

Kimberly Bonifacio, Internal Vice President

Johana Guerra Martinez, External Vice President

Eduardo "Lalo" Velazquez, General Representative 1

Orion Smedley, General Representative 2

Brandon J. Broukhim, General Representative 3

Naomi Riley, Academic Affairs Commissioner

Kelechi Iheanacho, Cultural Affairs Commissioner

Lily Shaw, Facilities Commissioner

Tara Steinmetz, Campus Events Commissioner

Jonathan Wisner, Community Service Commissioner

Mihika Sridhar, Student Wellness Commissioner

Millen Srivastava, Financial Supports Commissioner

Isabel Orah, Transfer Student Representative

Shahamah Tariq, International Student Representative