

Letter from ASUC President Will Smelko, On the upcoming UC-wide walkout, September 21, 2009

Dear Fellow Students,

With recent news of a potential 32% fee increase over the next year, we find the quality, affordability and accessibility of the UC system in jeopardy. We need your help, and we need solidarity in our response to those responsible for creating the problems that all CAL Students face.

This past Wednesday, the ASUC Senate unanimously passed a bill in support of the public actions which students, faculty and staff will employ this coming Thursday, September 24. The ASUC bill came on the heels of a meeting in which members of the faculty, including the Chair of the Academic Senate, spoke of the importance of students taking action to support the University in this fiscal crisis. Not even during the depression of the 1930's did student fees rise as suddenly and as much as they are now proposed to rise. For the University of California and in particular its flagship campus Berkeley to maintain educational excellence, we need a change of priorities in state government. When the state spends, as the Governor noted the other day, twice as much on prison operations as we do on student higher education in California, California must rethink and revamp our priorities.

Why a Walkout Now?

California is amidst a major budget crisis, and higher education is one primary area most deeply impacted by the state budget compromise. Last semester, we felt the budget cuts in the form of rising student fees, the “restructuring” of departments and the layoffs of faculty and staff personnel. However, never have cuts been so deeply seen and widely felt than when we returned to school in the fall. There are two ways this situation can be viewed: (1) Accept that state funding cannot be relied upon for instructional operations and given that, focus on the future; or (2) Fight and organize on a grassroots level nonstop until the state legislature and the UC Regents hear and heed our demands.

On July 16, President Mark Yudof made a conscious choice to advocate for the former. Yudof created the Commission on the Future of the UC to steer the University toward accepting “acceptable” cuts to higher education funding. That same day the UC Regents granted Yudof emergency powers and passed the furlough plan. Outraged by the direction in which the UC system was heading, intense organization on behalf of faculty and staff began. The UCOP dealt with these issues over the summer when it felt as if no one was really looking. This purported presentation of a fiscal *fait accompli* was the final straw warranting our visible, vigorous opposition. Faculty, staff and unions came to the conclusion that this unprecedented UCOP decision required an immediate response from all stakeholders in the UC system, including students, and the best day chosen to express our public show of unity was the very first day of

school for the majority of UC campus units. September 24th is the first day of instruction for all of the UCs except the two UCs on the semester system, UC Berkeley and UC Merced. Organizers recognized the importance of having a single unified action across all of the UC schools. Thus, while this particular day may mean a little less to us, we are standing in solidarity with our fellow UC student victims and find ourselves encouraging active support for the student walk out on September 24.

Why a Walkout at All?

At this point, so many groups have gotten involved with this movement (unions, students, faculty, and staff), and each group has different goals and objectives. In the formal open letter on behalf of the UC faculty, for example, faculty demands consisted of the following:

1. No furloughs or pay-cuts on salaries below \$40,000.
2. The immediate institution of the Academic Senate Council's July 29 recommendation regarding the implementation of furloughs.
3. Full disclosure of the budget.

However, as students have become more involved in this movement, grievances have spanned from salary roll-backs, to fee roll-backs, to mandating no fee increases beyond the rate of inflation and even to fee freezes. It is vitally important, however, that a broader message is communicated to the public, the legislature and the governor. We are walking out on September 24th to show our collective dismay concerning what is happening to the UC as an institution; to stand against the gutting of the UC as a public institution of higher learning; and to show unity among students, faculty and staff as we say that we will not accept the degradation of the UC system without a fight.

Why Support the Walkout?

On September 24th something truly monumental is going to happen on our campus and on other UC campuses across the State of California. On September 24th, together, we will stand in solidarity, students, faculty and staff, and united in the spirit of a defense to the legacy of public higher education, we will walk out. Never before has there been such a large-scale single action across all of the UCs. For the first time, we have seen an alliance being built among students, faculty and staff all taking a strong stand against the erosion of the quality, accessibility and affordability of our UC education. United, we are confident that we can fight these budget cuts, oppose the enormous fee increases being proposed, and preserve the excellence of the UC public education system at this very pivotal moment in time.

How Do I Get Involved?

We urge you to please talk with fellow students, with faculty in and out of the classroom, and with campus administrators to learn about and understand what can be done, given the nature of the California State budget process. The very first part of the “how to” is involvement and engagement. We're all in this together, and we need to save the University of California by taking action. One of the first things you can do is write your state legislator and let them know your grievances. To find them go to: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/yourleg.html>. Also, please

register to vote and let your legislator know that you are a registered voter who cares about the quality and affordability of a UC education.

Also this week, there will be teach-ins and other discussions on campus addressing the budget issues. Join in those discussions. We support the efforts of all students, faculty and staff who are saying with one voice, we cannot continue down the current path.

The Importance of Unity.

This is an issue that affects all UC Berkeley students. Beyond that, what is happening to each student, and their families, touches UC students, as well as all other State College and Community College students throughout California. In association with the Walkout, which the ASUC Senate as well as the University of California Student's Association unanimously voted to endorse and support, the ASUC will be hosting a de-briefing on the Walkout this Sunday, September 27th from 3pm-5pm. Please check the ASUC.org website for more updates and events.

Here is an excerpt from SAVEUC.org on the important events coming up this week that need your support:

"Save the Public University: A Teach-In on the UC Crisis"

Wednesday, September 23

Wheeler Auditorium

7-9 PM

Admission is Free.

Featured speakers include:

Ananya Roy, Professor of City and Regional Planning and Co-Director of Global Metropolitan Studies Center

Kevin Padian, Professor of Integrative Biology and President of the National Center for Science Education

Catherine Cole, Professor of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies

Wendy Brown, Professor of Political Science.

Robert Reich, Professor of Public Policy at the Goldman School of Public Policy

SAVEUC.org supports faculty, staff, and students who participate in the Systemwide Walkout on Sept. 24. We urge everyone to attend the noon rally at Sproul Plaza. These events, at least, will call attention to the problems of access, the loss of excellence and the shrouding of

transparency that is endemic, now, at Berkeley and throughout the UC governance system. Anyone can attend the noon rally without crossing any picket lines.

Included in these events will be analysis of the crisis, as well as a comprehensive description of ways each student can get involved to reverse or mitigate the proposed fee hikes and accessibility cutbacks. Small teaching events within departments, student groups, union organizations, and the like, will be held, as well as a major evening event on Sept. 23rd, in which some of the leading members of the faculty will address the problems facing public higher education at Berkeley and within California.

Again, please check ASUC.org for more updates and events. For more information on the Walkout and how you can fight for the quality and very existence of affordable public education, please visit the following websites:

<http://saveuc.org/>

<http://www.ucstudentwalkout.com/>

<http://asuc.org/newsite/pressreleases#/newsite/budget-cuts-watch-videos-of-the-faculty-panel-at-the-asuc-meeting/>

Please be proactive and stand together to oppose the devastation of higher education in California. Thank you, and let's all become part of a proud Berkeley tradition of meaningful and informed action.

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