

Order of The Golden Bear

διδάσκω

ESTABLISHED 1900

Usual Place, March 7th, 2023

The meeting was convened at 6:00pm

Items for the good of the order:

The fellowship starts with an announcement regarding nominations: Election cycle is coming up soon and it's time to start thinking about potential candidates.

Items for the good of the university: *The Graduate Student Worker Strike: Upsides and Downsides*

To begin the meeting, the Warden poses a few topics relating to the strike:

- What were the responses from the Departments, University, and UC?
 - Departmental grading restrictions: experience of pass/no pass options, or a lack thereof
- What were the repercussions of the strike?
 - Grades didn't come out till very late, while some still are yet to be released.
 - Students being weeded out of declaration courses during strike. Certain majors allowed PNP, while others did not.
- What should/could we have done differently? How do we recover from the setbacks created by the strike?
- How do these occurrences relate to the impression we, and others, have on the school?

Regarding Student Instructor experiences in the University:

- A fellow speaks on the experiences of teaching assistant (UGSI) in the data science department. The student instructors are overworked and underpaid. The department typically has the following appointments: 8 hour tutors, 8 hours readers, 8 hour TAs, and 20 hours TAs. This distinction determines whether a student instructor will get tuition reimbursement. As an 8 hour TA, one is contracted to work no more than 8 hours per week (there is no overtime). For most of the weeks, TA's are working beyond their contracted hours. The usual 8 hours only support normal teaching operations (office hours, lab, discussion, answering questions on forum). There are many weeks in the semester where administering exams, grading, or running projects will push TA's way beyond their contracted limit.
- The experience as an Reader in the Haas Business school. Pay is different not only between departments, but also within the departments. In Haas, one is not considered a Teaching Assistant but a Reader. Some readers are contracted and other readers are paid hourly. To this fellow, the outcome of the strike is confusing. The fellow is not sure what it means for different groups in the academic student employee communities.
- Graduate student contract is given as part of the offer letter to the University. The Graduate student is given an allowance, but has to go out and look for teaching appointments to fulfill the contract. Every single offer to a PHD student is different. There are very uneven salaries. Some students who received offers in previous years were making ~ 20,000\$ per year. For recent

contracts, a student may be getting 40,000\$. The student workers were asking for Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) and also a minimum salary that helps with these disparities. This was a big part of what the strike was about.

The ensuing department budget crisis

- A fellow provides data for EECS departments budget issues. There is circulation of a presentation with two scenarios under expected budgets for next year that would help the department get to solvency. There is expected \$0.8 million increase to the total instructional budget and full remission for 8 hr UGSIs (as is required under the union contract)
 - Scenario 1: Extreme Austerity under current staffing models
 - Optimizing for cost, essentially all 8 hour UGSI positions are changed to 20 hour positions.
 - -20% enrollment overall
 - It's closer to ~50% for classes like 61A. Dropping from 2000 students per semester to 1000 students.
 - +20% tutor/reader positions (still at 8 hour)
 - -35% ASE headcount
 - -66% UGSI headcount
 - Scenario 2: Optimize staffing positions under current budget:
 - 2 Zoomed mega sections per course. No regular discussion sections.
 - + 50% reader/tutor hours per student
 - Many existing GSI hours moved to tutor hours. 4 head GSI positions per large course, make the rest of the positions hourly.
 - Enrollment changes: 0%
 - ASE headcount changes: +20%
 - ASE hour changes +8%
 - GSI headcount change: -81%
 - Cost change: -\$5.54M
- A fellow mentions that the EECS department/students are heavily supported by student volunteers in an organization called Computer Science Mentors. There are a total of 300+ student volunteers that give their time to lead small (< 5 people) weekly sections for the intro courses like CS61A, CS61B, CS61C, EE16A, EE16B, CS70. Thousands of students benefit from these sections.

Student Perspective regarding the strike

- The student instructors had informed that there would be a possibility for a strike weeks before it started. However, during the strike, there was a lot of uncertainty regarding when it will end and what will happen to office hours, discussions, exams, and grades. It was a week to week situation and students were having difficulties with the classes. Some of the courses are mostly run by student instructors and cannot continue without them. The departments were hesitant and slow to announce their PNP policies. This caused a lot of unnecessary stress on students.

Insight into the UC Financial system

- The University of California is going to be raising tuition every year and every three years.

- Every 3 years, 5% for undergraduate students
- Every year, 5% for graduate students.
- There is a decline in international student admits and out of state admits.
 - This is part of a contention between the UC and the state:
 - California demands that UC needs to have a certain number of students from instate.
 - The state has been cutting the budget for the UCs, therefore UC has been forced to go for extra nonresident tuition dollars. UC charges out of state and international students higher tuition.
- Riverside, Irvine, Santa Cruz, Merced are receiving a large chunk of funding from the state because they don't have as many alumni.
 - Alumni is not a stable source of funding. When the economy is up, people are generous. But when the economy is down, people are not donating.
 - Macro economic Precipitous drop in UC Berkeley international student emissions. Fewer students applying from abroad.

Other comments/topics:

- A fellow that's part of the Union reflects that it was challenging to have a conversation about the strike. There was a lot of stress and people were quick to shut down differing opinions.
- The University has been trying to prevent the formation of this Union. Re: outcome of the strike. They didn't get a baseline increase across the board. But the outcome is that they will be increasing 8% per year. No childcare benefits. Have to pay for health insurance out of packages. It seems like the people who fought for the change will not be around to see the change.
- How does this affect the University image? The strike was happening across the entire UC. However, all of the images used by major publications were of Berkeley. What is the Berkeley reputation around this?

Discussion Adjourned at 7:30 PM.

The Meeting closed with Song, and notes were compiled by the Chronicler.