

March 8, 2021

David Brundage, Chair  
Academic Senate

**Re: CPB Assessment of Graduate Student Cost of Attendance and Living Calculator Report**

Dear David,

The Committee on Planning and Budget (CPB) has reviewed the “Report from the Graduate Student Cost of Attendance and Living Calculator Project” (September 2020). In this letter, we provide some background, assessment, and recommendations for Senate Executive Committee (SEC) review.

**Background**

In winter 2020, as the UCSC graduate student employee Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) wildcat strike was unfolding, CPB, then chaired by Professor Bruce Schumm, began discussions about whether it could play a constructive role in helping to resolve the turmoil then engulfing the campus. Given the central role that high costs of attendance and living in Santa Cruz played in discussions generated by the strike, the committee was especially interested in whether it could help bring some clarity to an understanding of actual costs experienced by graduate students. Aware of the important research conducted by Sociology professors Miriam Greenberg and Steve McKay on urban housing and poverty issues, CPB invited Professors Greenberg and McKay to discuss the formulation of a research project that culminated in the “Report from the Graduate Student Cost of Attendance and Living Calculator, ” hereafter the COA/COL report.

It is important to note that while the report had its origins in discussions within CPB, the document itself is not an Academic Senate report. Although three of its seven contributors were members of Senate committees (CPB and Graduate Council), the remainder of the group consisted of Professors Greenberg and McKay and two doctoral students. Support (in the form of two GSRs) was provided by CP/EVC Lori Kletzer and by Chris Benner, Director of the Institute for Social Transformation, not the Senate. Nonetheless, because it had its origins in CPB discussions, Senate Leadership determined that CPB should undertake an initial analysis of the report and make recommendations to the Senate Executive Committee.

**Overview**

In assessing the COA/COL report, CPB benefited from consultations with CP/EVC Kletzer and Graduate Council Chair Don Smith.

CPB appreciates the work of the committee and agrees that UCSC should develop an accurate and annually updated cost-of-attendance (COA) estimate. While there remain outstanding questions about an agreed upon COA estimate and how much the University is obliged to meet a doctoral/MFA students’ COA needs, CPB members agree there is still a gap between current salary + housing fellowship and graduate student COA needs. CPB further asserts there is an urgent moral imperative to resolve these matters. As such, CPB recommends that UCSC immediately work to further bridge the gap between current salary and housing stipends and doctoral/MFA student COA to improve graduate student welfare while the campus resolves other outstanding issues (discussed below).

**Assessment**

CPB made the following assessments:

1) The COA/COL report importantly identifies problems with how COA estimates are currently developed. For one, the cost estimates are based on self-reported survey data (a systemwide Graduate Cost of Attendance Survey [GCOAS]) instead of actual marketplace costs of housing and goods. CPB agrees that empirical data should serve as the basis for a COA estimate. CPB was not, however, in a position to critically assess the methodologies underlying the different estimates (MIT, University of Washington).

A second issue raised by the COA/COL report is that there is insufficient demographic information from the GCOAS system wide self-reporting survey, such as socio-economic background.

2) CPB had a discussion about the implications of using cost of living estimates. Some members argued that using cost of living estimates to provide baseline salary requirements is problematic because it assumes full time employment status. Consequently, if Academic Student Employees (ASEs) were provided COL salary on the basis of half time salary, such an increase would throw the University employment scales out of proportion. Moreover, increasing ASE salaries is a matter of negotiation between UCOP and UAW and outside local control.

Other members argued that though ASEs work as employees for 50% of the time, they spend at least another 50% of the time working to develop as scholars, artists and researchers and thus need to be supported at a level adequate to allow for that work.

All members agreed that the current ASE salary + housing fellowship stipend is inadequate for COA needs and that the gap should be bridged by additional fellowship support.

### **Recommendations**

CPB makes the following recommendations:

1) The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) should discuss whether it should endorse the need for UCSC to further bridge the gap between current ASE salary + housing fellowship and COA needs.

2) SEC should discuss and recommend the constitution of a “Senate assessment committee” that addresses outstanding issues with the COA/COL report to arrive at a campus agreed upon COA estimate. The Senate assessment committee should:

- a. evaluate the methodologies underlying the different estimates and determine which one is most appropriate for UCSC;
- b. discuss whether UCSC should develop its own COA survey.

3) Moreover, CPB recommends the COA/COL calculator use a range instead of midpoints for the cost-estimates. A range would allow prospective students to assess the financial feasibility of attending UCSC based on their specific circumstance and needs.

4) Following that, and supporting the COA/COL report recommendation, SEC should recommend the constitution of a “standing committee” that annually updates COA estimates and makes those publicly available for prospective graduate students and UCSC stakeholders.

5) CPB also recommends that this standing committee address how to support “non-traditional” students and/or students with greater financial needs, per the COA/COL report.

Sincerely,



Dard Neuman, Chair  
Committee on Planning and Budget

cc: Senate Director Mednick