

October 17, 2023

Dear Colleagues:

Graduate education is at the core of our mission as an AAU member university. It is our express ambition, as affirmed in the UCR 2030 strategic plan, to grow our doctoral programs. This growth includes not only a larger number of students enrolled at UCR, but also improved outcomes for those students in terms of graduation rates, time to degree, and career placements.

For the past several months, a campus workgroup that included Senate leaders, deans, and CFAOs has come together to assess the new financial reality of graduate education under the current UAW contracts. **Below, we announce new investments to sustain quality and stabilize our doctoral programs at UCR, as a first step towards achieving our desired growth.**

In 2016-17, UCR enrolled 493 new PhD and state-supported MFA students. Since then, new enrollments have declined, for reasons that remain unclear. Although we made \$12.2M available to fund first-year fellowships for 375 new students in 2023-24 (to match the number enrolled in 2022-23), only 333 enrolled. Beginning in 2024-2025, to help meet the increased costs of supporting our continuing students and to better coordinate our efforts to recruit new students, this \$12.2M in permanent central funds along with **\$7M in new permanent central funds** will be allocated directly to the schools and colleges to support both TAs and fellowships. Working with their department chairs, deans will be required to provide an annual accounting of how these funds have been spent to the Provost and Dean of the Graduate Division. In addition, we are committing **\$5M in new one-time funds** to the Graduate Division to support fellowship quarters for first-year students in 2024-25. Another \$2.5M of existing permanent funds will remain in the Graduate Division to be distributed as recruitment and dissertation completion fellowships.

These investments should allow us to make a reasonable transition to the exigencies of the UAW contracts, maintain our graduate student enrollments in the near term, and then give us time to plan for future needs beyond next year. We also understand the need to finalize a plan for 2024-25 at this time, given the imminent recruitment timeline.

As noted in an [earlier communication](#), **the central campus has already invested \$11.1M in one-time funds** to support the additional costs of TAs and GSRs per the UAW contracts and to support fellowships for incoming graduate students at the base TA rate of \$29,000 for the 9-month academic year in 2023-24. For 2024-25, all PhD students must be supported at the minimum rate of \$34,000 for the 9-month academic year.

These changes will move us away from a “cohort” funding model for graduate education and improve coordination and flexibility when making offers to new students. We are aware of concerns that these changes could increase inequities among students, but it

is important to recognize that **the cohort model in place at UCR was neither sufficient nor equitable for our graduate students.** In 2020-21, the average “per student average” funding level from the Graduate Division was \$30,000. Of that, \$17,000 went to pay for tuition (including health care), leaving the student with an average \$13,000 stipend. Some students received a \$5000 “add-on” for merit or diversity from central funds (administered by the Graduate Division). Neither \$18,000 or \$13,000 was enough to live on, so some first-year students (20% in 2022-23) worked as TAs and others worked as GSRs during quarters when they also received fellowship support, either to make ends meet or because of their program’s requirements. In addition, 5% of first year PhD students and 6.5% of continuing PhD students took out federal loans.

Also, the “per student average” varied among programs. In 2020-21, for example, it ranged from \$28,000 to \$35,000 (and these totals included the \$17,000 for tuition and health insurance, so the average net stipend amount varied from \$11,000 to \$18,000). Furthermore, student stipends varied within programs. In 2018-19, the total stipend range for first-year students enrolled for fall/winter/spring was \$3273 to \$32,821, and the range for just the amounts from the central first-year fellowship allocated through the Graduate Division (without any add-ons) was \$1563 to \$19,800. Thus, there was significant inequity across colleges, programs, and individuals in first-year stipends, beyond what might be expected given the differences in competition for students in different disciplines.

The UAW forced us to reckon not only with the insufficiency of salaries for TAs and GSRs in the UC system, but, here at UCR, we also had to reckon with the insufficiency and inequity of our cohort model system. As noted above, for this academic year, 2023-24, we dipped into one-time funds to be able to offer every first-year student three quarters of fellowship at \$29,000 (exclusive of tuition, fees, and health insurance), the same amount as the first increment of the TA salary scale. **Going forward, we believe it is imperative to offer our PhD students a multiyear funding package that includes a guaranteed annual minimum salary/stipend equal to the first increment of the TA salary scale.** In 2024-25, this amount will be \$34,000. This minimum standard should provide greater equity to our PhD students across campus.

The fundamental issue we face is that we don’t have the permanent funding to continue to offer every entering student three fellowship quarters at \$34,000 while continuing to meet the needs of our teaching mission. **Neither the state of California nor the UC Office of the President has identified new funds for these increased costs; every campus is expected to find the money within their existing budgets.** Currently at UCR we have the following permanent funds for PhD student stipends and TA salaries:

\$12.2M (central)  
\$31.5M (schools and colleges)  
\$6.8M (new to schools/colleges; plus \$200K allocated for fees, managed centrally)  
**\$50.5M TOTAL**

In 2024-25, we will need an estimated **\$44.5M** to pay the TAs to support the faculty in their undergraduate teaching, based on maintaining levels from 2021-22 and 2022-23. This leaves **\$6.0M** for fellowships. If we accept 375 new PhD students and provide them with a \$34,000 fellowship stipend plus health insurance for the three quarters of their first year, that cost would be **\$14.7M**, leaving us with a deficit of **\$8.7M**. To break even, we can offer an average of 1.2 quarters of fellowship instead of a full 3 quarters. As noted above, we are investing **\$5M** in new one-time funds to provide an additional quarter of fellowship for each of the 375 new students in 2024-25, raising the average number of fellowship quarters per student to at least two.

**Going forward, Graduate Dean Kos will engage with the department chairs, faculty graduate program directors, and school/college deans in thoughtful and candid discussions to identify the bases on which cohort sizes for doctoral programs will be determined.** Previously, cohort size has been decided based on history (i.e., how many students were admitted in prior years) and faculty size (i.e., there should be x students for y faculty). Another way to make these decisions is to base them on [student outcomes](#), e.g., [graduation rates](#), [time to degree](#), and career placements. We owe it to our students to graduate them in a timely fashion and to launch them onto meaningful career paths. Another consideration, of course, is their labor as TAs and GSRs in support of the faculty, but those roles should be secondary to their personal success as students.

We look forward to additional robust, collaborative, and constructive conversations in the months ahead, as we work to stabilize PhD and MFA enrollments for 2024-25. We also fully recognize that we will have to continue to address funding for graduate education for 2025-2026 and beyond, given the current UAW contracts expire on May 31, 2025, and will therefore be up for renegotiation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Watkins, PhD  
Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor

Lidia Kos, PhD  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies