

To Those Concerned With The Current State of Graduate Housing:

The following document outlines problems experienced by graduate and professional students regarding housing, and offers several solutions. First and foremost, graduate and professional students at UCI (hereafter “graduate students”) identify affordability as their primary housing concern.

- * 90% of graduate students are spending more than the federal housing guideline of 30% of household income on rent.

- * UCI's greatest impediment to recruiting and retaining top-caliber graduate students is the lack of affordable housing.

Secondarily, the lack of communication and consistency regarding housing terms, placements, and transfers causes a significant waste of graduate students' and the administration's time and money.

- * Unclear housing policies hinder recruitment, retention, and progress towards degree.

Moving forward, it is critical for the administration to include informed graduate students in all aspects of planning and decision-making with regards to housing.

- * Graduate input will help housing address problem areas and identify workable solutions.

Puerta del Sol's extremely low occupancy rates exemplify each of the above problems.

Sincerely,

Associated Graduate Students
Internal Committee

Lowell Trott, Vice President of Internal Affairs
Angela Hawk, Council Member
Denise Stephens, Campus Organizing Director
Erik Tollerud, Council Member
Fawn Huisman, Council Member
Hanoz Santoke, Council Member
Ian Tingen, PVRC Representative
Joel Ossher, Campus Communications Director
Nadine Amsel, Council Member

Graduate Housing Issue Report, February 2011

1. Affordability [21]

- Housing is the single largest expense graduate students have [1] [T1,T2,T4,T5].
- 90% of graduate students at UCI pay rent above the federal guideline of 30% of income [2,3,5].
- No affordable housing options exist off-campus in a 5-mile radius around UCI [1].
- Of first year students, only 10% requested an ACC community as their first choice [1]. Over 50% of all first year students were assigned to ACC communities [17].
- Of the same group, 60% requested Verano Place [1].
- The mismatch between affordable rent by stipend and ACC rent is stark, as shown in Table 1 and 2 from UC pay scales and rent [4,5].

Table 1. Affordability Estimates for Low, Medium, and High-Earning Graduate Students based on UC Academic Salary Pay Scales at 50% Appointment [4,5,12]

Academic Pay Scale	Annual Gross Income Estimate	Maximum Affordable Rent/Month (30%)
GSR 1 (Lowest Pay)	\$16,650	\$416.25
Teaching Assistant*	\$16,969	\$424.25
GSR 5 (Medium Pay)	\$22,320	\$558
GSR 10 (Highest Pay)	\$31,776	\$795

*This figure reflects a \$332.50/annum pay increase instated on February 1, 2011.

Table 2: Percentage of Monthly Income Low, Medium, and High-Earning Graduate Students Must Spend on Rent at UCI's Privately Owned Housing Communities[4,5,12]*

	Vista del Campo	Vista del Campo Norte	Puerta del Sol
Lowest Monthly Rent, Per Student	\$776	\$919	\$1003
GSR I	56%	66%	72%
TA	55%	65%	71%
GSR 5	42%	49%	54%
GSR 10	29%	35%	38%

*All rates and figures reflect 2010-11 academic year.

II. Communication and Transparency

- Housing policies are inconsistently applied to graduate students [6] [T2,T3].
- During recruitment, the low availability of Verano and PV housing is not communicated.
Verano and Palo Verde are often used to assure recruits that affordable and family housing is available near UCI [T2] [13,14,15,16].
Upon acceptance, many students are shocked that the only housing offered is in ACC communities [T2,T4][13,16].
- Leases and Placement
There is a mismatch between PV/VP, VDC, and PDS housing lease dates [7][T3,T4].
Procedures for transfers and breaking leases are unclear, and inconsistently enforced [T2,T3].
- Waitlist
It is not clear whether a housing waitlist actually exists, and if it does, the number of students on it [2,6]. Figures that have been cited suggest that nearly a quarter of UCI's graduate students think they are on the housing waitlist; some for over 5 years [T2,T3].
The AGS Internal committee is aware of only a small number who have been placed into housing via the waitlist.
However, many people have seemingly circumvented the waitlist by making repeated requests to housing staff; making the waitlist the exception not the rule [T2,T3].
- As an example of the lack of communication, many faculty are unaware of the above and continue to use affordable housing as a recruitment tool, leading to a culture of bait-and-switch.

III. Governance

- The organizational structure of housing is unclear, leaving graduate students with no recourse for addressing problems and concerns [T2, T4].
- \$55,000, at 30 years with 5% interest, of housing money spent modifying a turnout on Anteater Road as requested by faculty to fix a problem of questionable validity. Cheaper solutions to the problem were offered by PVRC and ignored [8].
- New Childcare facility being constructed in new Verano. The cost of the facility will be absorbed into Housing, but only 25% of usage is by graduate student children [9].
- Graduate students were surveyed regarding the development of new construction in Verano [19]. However, communication ceased after the initial survey, and graduate students played no part in the actual decision making process.
- A cat ban was implemented over the objections of an organized opposition by graduate students; proposed alternatives were rejected without explanation.

- Puerta del Sol was designed to house 561 graduate students (565 beds with 4 for staff) [10,18], but as of Feb 2011, houses 160 [18]. Despite being built as a graduate community, it also houses 131 non-graduate student residents, including faculty, postdocs, and visiting scholars [18,20]. This could have been avoided if graduate students were consulted regarding the trade-offs between cost and amenities.
- Graduate students often express concern that housing is not managed with any of their interests or values in mind [2].

IV. Solutions

- Affordability
 - Any future housing should prioritize affordability and meet federal affordability guidelines.
 - Immediately begin phasing in need-based rent subsidies for graduate student housing.
 - Bring GSR and TA incomes in line with housing affordability
 - Pace salary increases with rent increases.
 - Adjust recruitment to match available funding¹
 - Do not assign incoming students to Puerta del Sol unless requested.
 - Allow students to defer guarantee for one year if they are assigned housing they cannot afford.
- Communication and Transparency
 - End cat moratorium and actively involve graduate students in determining a new cat policy.
 - Overhaul the current waitlist.
 - Continuously update all names on the list and consolidate Palo Verde and Verano to a unified waitlist.
 - Update the waitlist policies, including instituting a fair exception policy, and follow the policies consistently.
 - Provide students on the waitlist with reasonable time estimates.
 - Actively involve graduate students in any decision-making concerning the graduate guarantee.
 - No changes should be made to the guarantee without consulting AGS and comprehensively surveying the graduate and professional student body.
 - Any adjustments to the guarantee should be tabled until the other problems outlined here are addressed.
 - Accurately represent housing costs, availability, and policies to students.
 - Require recruiters to familiarize themselves with current information.
 - Make such information readily accessible in recruitment materials and online.

¹While AGS acknowledges the value of the Strategic Plan, the current fiscal climate at UCI is unprecedented.

Streamline transfer policies between ACC and GFH communities

- Allow students to defer renewal decisions at ACC until GFH has extended offers.
- Match lease periods between ACC and GFH communities.

Consider re-introducing month-to-month leases.

○ Governance

Any cost savings in graduate housing should be reinvested into graduate housing

Future housing should be built and managed by UCI to make housing more responsive to graduate student residents.

Residents should be actively involved in the governance of their communities in order to best reflect their needs.

Policies and record-keeping between GFH communities should be made as consistent as possible.

Revise placement policies

- Require GFH to implement placement surveys similar to those of ACC and make them available to potential roommates
- Give students more choices and increased time to determine compatibility with potential roommates.

Include AGS and resident council representatives **with votes** on all housing-related decision-making bodies.

Create a database to manage all resident-related data for GFH.

- AGS will facilitate this process if needed.²

1. "UCI Graduate and Professional Student Funding and Mentor Experience Survey". UCI Graduate Division and Associated Graduate Students. Spring 2010.

2. "Survey of Graduate Student Bill of Rights- UCI". UC Graduate Student Association. February 2011.

3. "Glossary of HUD Terms- Affordable Housing". HUD.gov. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. http://www.huduser.org/portal/glossary/glossary_all.html. Accessed January 2011.

4. "University of California Academic Pay Scales" University of California Office of the President. October 1, 2010. http://apo.ucsc.edu/academic_compensation_and_benefits/original_docs_and_pdfs/scales-crnt.pdf

5. "UCI Student Housing Rates - 2010-11". <http://www.housing.uci.edu/rates.asp> Accessed February 11, 2011.

6. UCI Graduate and Professional Student testimonials. Compiled by AGS Internal Committee. February 2011.

7. UCI Student Housing. <http://www.housing.uci.edu/policies/>. Accessed February 11, 2011.

8. "Admin Bills Palo Verde After Profs Complain" Young, Ophelia. New University.

²A database will allow housing staff to easily maintain the waitlist and transfers, maintain occupancy data, track students' guarantee status, store student data, generate statistics about different housing aspects, etc.

October 09, 2006. http://www.newuniversity.org/2006/10/news/admin_bills_palo_verde10/
Accessed February 12, 2011.

9. "AGS Requests Shared Financing of Child Care Facility in New Verano Construction". AGS Resolution 10-44. <http://www.ags.uci.edu/documents/Legislation/index.php>. Accessed February 11, 2011.

10. Graduate & Family Housing: Community Descriptions http://www.housing.uci.edu/prospective/graduate/community_desc.asp Accessed February 17, 2011

11. "Palo Verde Construction Proves Burdensome for Residents". Patel, Sona. *New University*. January 12, 2004. http://www.newuniversity.org/2004/01/news/palo_verde_construction_proves131/ Accessed February 12, 2011.

12. "Opposition to Unaffordable On-Campus Graduate Student Housing". AGS Resolution 10-34. http://www.ags.uci.edu/council/legislationprint.php?cnum=10-31&gov_branch=AGS

13. "Letter to graduate council Re Housing". Poletta, Francesca (Prof. of Sociology) and Maurer, Bill (Acting Assoc. Dean of Social Sciences). May 25, 2010.

14. "Letter to Graduate Council Re Graduate Housing Issues". Hemminger, John C., Dean of Physical Sciences. May 26, 2010.

15. "Letter to UCI Graduate Council Re Graduate Housing Costs". LaFarge, Antoinette, Assoc. Dean, Claire Trevor School for the Arts. May 25, 2010.

16. "Letter to Graduate Council Re Grad student housing placements". Mimura, Glen. Assoc. Dean, School of Humanities. May 26, 2010.

17. "2010 GGH Notes". Nguyen, Lin and Cornish, Lisa. CGG Meeting, February 14, 2011.

18. McCauliff, Dennis. <dmccauliff@studenthousing.com> "Puerta del Sol Info" February 18, 2011 Personal Email

19. "Verano Place Unit 4 Redevelopment Resident Feedback Report". Graduate and Family Housing. Jan/Feb 2010

20. "Puerta del Sol Resident Composition". Study Group on Student Housing " December 2010

21. *A common assumption is that graduate students, like undergraduates, will simply use student loans to close the gap between living expenses and income. This expectation is unrealistic on several counts. To start, many doctoral students already have substantial undergraduate debt and are at risk of maxing out their borrowing privileges if they are forced to continue to take loans over the course of their 5-10 year graduate career. Further, federally subsidized loans for graduate students max out at a total of \$8500 per year. For students who subsist principally on TA stipends, federal loans would bring their total income to \$25,469 and the amount of rent they could afford (according to federal guidelines) to \$637 [3,4]. As shown in Table II, this leaves all of ACC out of reach, and a portion of Palo Verde as well [5]. Even with loans, a large portion of UCI housing is too expensive.*

Also attached are a series of Testimonials, cited above as "T#," chosen to select common attitudes and actual experiences of graduate students and their housing concerns.

Testimonials

T1

My housing is unaffordable. My housing is 1348 per month and my stipend is 2025 per month. My rent is 66.6% of my income. Moreover, Puerta del Sol admits that the monthly payment of 1313 is not monthly rent, it is the monthly installment, and the rent is really more than that, but the difference between monthly rent and monthly installment is paid up front. They have also alerted me that my rent will not be the same next year, even if my stipend is the same, suggesting that next year, my housing will be more than 67% of my income. This does not include a clothing washing machine or dryer, which together costs roughly \$2 per load, and electricity or phone service.

T2

My name is [redacted] and I am a third year graduate student in the Department of Biological Chemistry. I would first like to give a brief background of myself and my family, and then share some thoughts on our experience with UCI graduate housing. I came to UCI through the Cellular and Molecular Biology (CMB) PhD program in the Fall of 2008. My wife and I both moved here from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah on July 7th, 2008 and accepted a housing offer given to us through the graduate housing guarantee. [Redacted], my wife, had worked from the time we moved to UCI until August of 2010, and we had our first baby September of 2010. Due to the nature of her work, [she] was not given an option to return to work after she took her maternity leave. We currently live in a one bedroom apartment in the newer side of Palo Verde (Unit H).

With that introduction, I would like to share my experience as a married graduate student living on campus at Palo Verde. We received an offer from Palo Verde on May 20, 2008 for an L Unit (2 bedroom townhome) Palo Verde. Rent at the time was \$1438.00 per month, which was clearly out of our budget (nearly 70% of the stipend that I receive). The offer was a bit of a shock to us, especially considering the approximately 10 other more affordable options that we listed in our original housing application (for us, affordability was among the most important concerns). However, we decided to accept the offer, thinking that we should be grateful for being offered anything at all. At the time, we thought it was a take it or leave it type of offer, and were not aware of any possibility of discussing with the housing administration a more affordable option. Which leads me to my first couple of suggestions for improving the housing system: make sure new admits understand that there is some flexibility to discuss their offer if it does not meet their needs. Also, in our experience, even though affordability was our biggest concern, we were assigned the most unaffordable unit. When we submitted our ranked list of units that we would be willing to take (ranked from least to most expensive), the unit we were assigned was the most expensive and at the bottom of our ranked list. In

fact, I recall we had removed that unit from our list of acceptable apartments. So we accepted our offer and moved in on July 7th, 2008. As we were in the process of signing the paperwork to pick up our keys we voiced our concern about the high rent to Patsy Nydam, the PV assignments administrator. We let her know that we had enough savings to cover the rent for a few months, but we would not be able to sustain the cost. She understood our concern and gave us the paperwork for a transfer request, which we submitted the same day (the transfer request was for a cheaper unit in either PV or Verano). We left her office with the original apartment we had been assigned, but we also felt that we had reached a verbal agreement that we would be assigned a more affordable unit, likely during the Fall semester after most of the new students moved in. We were never reassigned to a cheaper unit.

We patiently waited for a new housing assignment, assuming that eventually our turn would come since we were on the waiting list (or so we thought). That brings us to January 2010; *we had presumably been on the waiting list about 18 months*. With our savings of nearly \$12,000 completely gone (all spent on rent), we felt the urgency to more actively pursue a cheaper apartment. We had calculated that after April 2010 we would not be able to pay rent anymore. We had also learned later in January 2010 that we were pregnant, which added significantly to the financial burden. Since our ultimate goal was (and still is) to transfer to Verano Place we contacted Gail Roy (Jan 19, 2010), the Associate Director at Verano Place. She was referred to us by a previous student that had successfully been transferred from PV to Verano a few months prior to that time. We met with her on Jan 22, 2010. The meeting was short and brief. We explained our situation and she expressed some concern and directed us to the waiting list, suggesting we update our information and family status (the addition of a baby). We felt that we were basically told to wait like everyone else.

A few days later we walked into the Palo Verde offices to discuss our situation, and were fortunate to talk to Gerald Parham, the PV housing director, for a few minutes. He also suggested to update our wait list information, and made an even stronger suggestion to find housing off campus, which was extremely disheartening for us. We had actually looked into that option already, and I am sure you are aware that the money saved in rent goes toward other new costs (traveling to campus, gas, parking permits, utilities, etc). Also, *why should we even have to consider looking for off campus housing when UCI advertises guaranteed housing?*

Gerald had also informed us to discuss our situation with Shauntay Larkins, the current assignments supervisor. We contacted her by email on Jan 31, 2010, received no response after a week and contacted her again on Feb 7, 2010. We received a response the next day to let us know that she was not able to address our concern at the time, and would get to it within 48-72 hours. We didn't receive a response so we contacted her again on Feb 16 and Feb 22, 2010. We finally received a response on Feb 22, 2010 in which she let us know that there were many students that had contacted her with similar transfer requests, and that she would send a more general email on transfer policies shortly. We received that email on Feb 26, 2010, which basically said that because of our annual contract we are not allowed to transfer between communities. She specifically said "With respect to transferring **between** communities, annual leaseholders are prohibited from doing so because they have a June 30th lease end date and are expected to honor the terms of their contract with the University." We were also encouraged to

transfer within the Palo Verde community.

At that point we were feeling quite confused for a couple reasons. First, we had been waiting for a transfer offer within PV for over 19 months; and secondly, we had seen several people under the annual contract transfer between communities. What made them so special that they could move between communities? We were also very confused because by that time we had realized the UCI housing website (<http://www.housing.uci.edu/prospective/graduate/index.asp>) had this statement in big red letters:

Housing Spaces Still Available for 2009-10. Apply NOW!

Call (949) 824-6811 or email Housing@uci.edu for more information.

We had been under the impression this statement also included Palo Verde and Verano. We also received many reports from people in Verano Place that there were multiple empty apartments in their area and signs posted in laundry areas looking for people to fill empty apartments. At one point we had actually found a couple that wanted to move out of Verano, and asked if we would to take their apartment. We presented the option to PV and Verano and it was swiftly rejected by both communities.

Shauntay's email also mentioned an exceptions committee that met twice a month to discuss people who felt they had "extenuating circumstances", so on March 1, 2010 we again contacted Shauntay requesting to meet with her to get more information on the committee. We met with her on March 3 and we had the paperwork prepared by March 4, which was the day of the next committee meeting. We included with the paperwork a statement emphasizing our need to be transferred to a more affordable unit, as well as charts and graphs to emphasize our financial hardship since the time we moved to UCI (details down to every penny), pay stubs, bank statements, even tax documents. All of which emphasized the same thing: we literally would not be able to pay the rent after April 2010. We also gave them a budget summary showing that after removing the rent cost from my stipend (about 67% of the stipend) and the other necessary bills we had, we would be left with \$14.77 in our budget (which also had to cover the cost of food). To this day I still don't eat lunch because we cannot afford it. We received notice on March 11, 2010 that our petition to the exceptions committee had been denied. It specifically stated that we had "not yet fully explored options within our community to ease the financial burden", and they could not justify moving us to the top of the waitlist ahead of other applicants. We had also been directed to contact Student Accounts to "discuss alternate payment arrangements" for when we could not cover our rent. We had actually done that already (and made mention of it in our petition). The only help they could offer was to let us defer one month of rent with the requirement that by the time the next month's rent is due we have to pay the previous month's rent and the current month's rent in full. That was an unacceptable short term solution to what we clearly showed would be a long term problem. To us it was the least logical solution they had suggested.

When we received the denial of our petition we were told to contact Kerri Sherwood from Palo Verde and Gail Roy from Verano for further information. I essentially wrote a rebuttal to what was stated in the petition and emphasized that (1) we had already "explored" other options within Palo Verde with no success, (2) requested to know where we are on the wait list, and (3) reminding them *again* that Student Accounts could not offer us an appropriate solution to our problem. This was sent to Kerri Sherwood, Shauntay Larkins, and Gail Roy. Gail Roy responded the next day, stating

many students request to move from PV to Verano because of financial hardship. She wrote, "We deny all of the requests because the majority of students (with or without children) have financial issues. We do not consider financial issues a priority." We feel financial issues is a *major* problem and should be made a priority. She reiterated their situation of having to relocate the current Verano students that lived in the recently torn down buildings. Lastly, she said "You will get into Verano eventually, but it will probably be sometime next academic school year." We are seriously considering holding her to that statement. We also find it interesting that within a timeframe of a couple of weeks we had Shauntay tell us there is absolutely no way a transfer between communities will be allowed, and we had Gail tell us that eventually we would get into Verano; huge discrepancy there.

The response I received from Shauntay Larkins was very shocking for us. Recall that we had been on the waitlist since the day we moved in on July 7, 2008. Shauntay informed us that there was no record of us going on the waitlist that day. The only waitlist records dated back to Jan 31, 2010, which was the day we "updated" our family status after talking to Gail Roy. *We thought we had been on the waitlist since 2008, but they have absolutely no records of us being placed on the waitlist until January 2010!* Shauntay thought that what may have happened was that the waitlist paperwork never got processed when we moved in, because when we signed the contract for the unit we were assigned, we also signed an agreement to be removed from the waitlist (standard procedure for all contracts). So we may have never been placed on the waitlist because we had just signed a contract for a unit the same day. Regardless, we were never placed on the waitlist in July 2008. Shauntay did a search for our position on the waitlist. There were 1589 total applicants on the list, 1182 of them waiting to get into Palo Verde and/or Verano Place. We were dead last on the list of 1182 applicants, with 1181 people ahead of us on the list. Shauntay then told us to talk to Gerald Parham if we had further questions.

Kerri Sherwood did not respond to the email I had sent her, but I assume since she was CC'd on the email I received from Shauntay that she would have told me the same thing.

At that point Palo Verde said the best option they could offer us was a two bedroom flat (Unit I or J) which was *only \$54 cheaper than the rent we were paying at the time*. That was the only option they gave us, which clearly was not an affordable option. We felt it was necessary to take our problem to a higher authority, so on March 12, 2010 we went as high as we could go by contacting Lisa Cornish, Senior Executive Director of Student Housing. We met on about March 15, 2010 and had a very interesting discussion. We explained our situation to her, emphasizing again the fact that we could not continue to pay the rent and that we also had a baby on the way in September 2010. Her exact response was, "Well it looks like you are in quite a pickle!" She then went on to explain that our only record of going on the waitlist was in January 2010 and there was no record of us even applying in July 2008. I had been so frustrated about the waitlist by that point that I shared with her my doubts regarding its fair use, or even its existence. She then pulled out of a filing cabinet a huge list of applicants printed from a dot matrix printer. To my best recollection there was information about who had applied, to what community, the date they applied, and some other information that I can't recall at the moment. Sure enough though, she found my name on it with the application dated to

January 2010.

At that point she informed us that several years ago they were able to make exceptions based on financial hardship, but now they can't because they estimate about 90% of the students are facing financial hardship and they can't accommodate all of them. Also, moving to Verano Place was not an option because of the buildings that were being torn down. She asked if a one bedroom in Palo Verde was a suitable option for us. We told her we could afford that (it was about \$500 cheaper than the unit we were in at the time). But we also let her know that with a baby on the way, we would eventually need a two bedroom apartment and would only be able to afford Verano Place. Naturally, she made no promises on that issue. It was clear her end goal was to get us into a unit we considered affordable. So she called Gerald Parham at Palo Verde put him on speakerphone. She simply asked him if there were any one bedroom apartments available. We heard a couple clicks in the background as he searched and sure enough, a few seconds later he responded saying that there was one available. She asked him to put it on hold and told us we could have a couple days to decide if we wanted to take it. And as simple as that, a problem we had been fighting over the previous 21 months was resolved in a matter of minutes with one simple phone call from Lisa Cornish! I also find it very curious that there were no one bedroom options available in Palo Verde on Friday March 12, but somehow over the weekend a one bedroom unit suddenly became available by 1pm on Monday March 15.

Needless to say, we accepted the offer. We didn't have much of a choice at that point because we had less than \$100 to our name. It wasn't the ideal solution that we hoped for, mainly because it wasn't a two bedroom in Verano Place, but also because it was on the 3rd floor (which I assume you could imagine is tough for a pregnant woman, especially when the doctor tells her to avoid stairs at all costs). But by that point we were so relieved about the \$500 in rent that we would be saving that we accepted the offer. Kerri Sherwood gave us an informal offer on the unit by March 17, 2010, to which we agreed. By March 24, 2010 the formal offer with all the details was drafted, we accepted it, and then we moved into our new one bedroom unit in Palo Verde on April 23, 2010. We got back on the waitlist for a unit in Verano Place the next day.

We currently reside in the same one bedroom unit and with the addition of a newborn we are starting to feel the need for a second bedroom. Our son sleeps in the same room with us and is a very light sleeper. The doctor says on average a 4 month old baby should sleep at least 4 to 6 hours straight. On a good night our son's longest sleep is about 2 hours, and he usually wakes up about once every hour. We basically can't even roll over in bed without waking him up. As you could imagine, it is very stressful for us, and it is even affecting my ability to perform at what I would consider an acceptable level as a graduate student. I find myself coming into lab late and unprepared far too often, and I think lack of sleep is the key reason for that. Our doctor mentioned that the best solution to that kind of sleeping issue is to give the baby its own quiet space to sleep, and suggested we find a place with a second bedroom. The reason I am sharing our current living conditions is to emphasize a need for more affordable housing. All two bedroom units in Palo Verde are far too expensive for our budget. There are many units in Verano Place that have two bedrooms at a similar rate we are paying now, and from what we have experienced they seem to be in the highest demand. It only seems logical in this case that if that is where the greatest demand is, then that is the goal that should be

aspired to. I think it is ridiculous to see UCI building luxury apartments when, according to Lisa Cornish, 90% of the students are facing serious financial hardship (i.e. can't pay the rent).

In regards to our experience with the transfer process, we feel it is a system that needs to be completely redesigned. I know this may be a naive statement, but whether we live in Palo Verde or Verano Place, we write our rent checks out to the same group. For that reason there should be absolutely no difficulties transferring between housing communities. I also feel that UCI needs to take care of its internal affairs before dealing with new admits. By that I mean they should allow the existing residents to transfer prior to assigning units to the new admits. We have been waiting longer, so shouldn't we get first priority over the new students? However you look at it, there is a major problem with the transfer process that needs to be fixed.

I hope this lengthy description of our experience with UCI housing is helpful. My wife has also read through this and feels it is an accurate description of our experience. If I can be of assistance in any way with regards to housing I am very willing to help. I also have email records of all the conversations mentioned above, as well as the Exceptions Committee paperwork I submitted. If you feel they would help I will gladly forward them to you. I wish you the best of luck with all your endeavors in resolving issues concerning UCI housing. From what I have experienced in the past, you're going to need all the luck you can get!

T3

I moved into Palo Verde when I started school three and a half years ago. I loved my apartment: it was big, well maintained, affordable, and close to campus. The community was great also, without the excessive rules of Vista del Campo, grills and open spaces for weekend barbecues, and with generally helpful office staff. I was quite happy to stay there while I wanted to live alone.

After I'd been in PV for two years, my boyfriend and I decided we wanted to move in together the next year, and I started the process of figuring out how to apply for the joint apartment, planning to stay in PV because I'd been so happy there. Also, I have guinea pigs and we were planning on getting a cat, so VdC wasn't an option, and it was heading into the Verano construction so we figured we couldn't get a space there.

I spent several hours wandering through the housing website, attempting to figure out what we needed to do to get an apartment together, and eventually gave up. The website said it was possible, but didn't tell me how. My next step, in January of last year, was to stop by the housing office in the student center to ask how to do it. They said I needed to apply in the PV office, so I headed there. The staff there was very nice and helpful, and gave me the paperwork that I needed to fill out. I had concerns about how the lease would be handled, because my boyfriend was coming from VdC where the lease ended in September, while my PV lease ended at the end of June, and they assured me that they would work it out. I was never given the impression that we might not get placed, and left happily thinking of the wonderful apartment we'd get.

Months went by. My boyfriend told VdC of his intent not to sign the lease, when meant we really had to find a place to live or he'd be homeless, but we weren't worried: PV had said we'd get placed. Then it came time for the PV lease signing. We hadn't gotten a call yet for the new apartment, so I came in to ask them what I was supposed to do.

Suddenly, the story was drastically different. I was told that they couldn't guarantee us a new apartment, and that if I resigned my lease but wasn't placed with my boyfriend that I couldn't break the new lease to move somewhere else with him. I asked if they could estimate when I'd get placed, and they refused. I asked where I was on the waitlist, and I was told that there was no list. Finally, I was told that I had until the end of that business day to decide if I wasn't to re-sign my PV lease. The choice was A. re-sign, gambling on being placed before my boyfriend's lease ran out, knowing he'd be homeless if we weren't placed, or B. not sign, and move off campus, knowing we might be placed any day.

I chose not to re-sign. We did some quick research, and now we live in Stanford Court. I try to make the best of it: we're living together, we have a cat, it's close to campus, but basically I'm terribly angry about it. The rent at our place is \$1524/month for a 1 bedroom apartment. If we could have been on campus we'd have two bedrooms and be paying hundreds less a month. Then there's the shenanigans that went on with the waitlist. I know there is a waitlist, and I know they have shown it to residents before: the week before I was told there was no list, a friend of mine asked to see where she was on the list and was shown the file. Another friend wanted to move in with her boyfriend, and decided to circumvent the process. She told the PV office that her current roommate was awful and she absolutely had to move, which wasn't at all true, so that she could get placed somewhere else, and finagled it so that she was placed with her boyfriend. I followed all the rules and got screwed and live off campus now. The lesson I learned: I should be more of a bitch when dealing with office staff - maybe it will get me what I want. Listening to other people's stories, the trend I've seen is that pushy people get what they want, while polite people who follow the rules are ignored.

At this point, I don't know what to tell prospective grad students when they ask about housing here. It was always only marginally affordable, and the options just get more expensive and more restrictive. Puerta del Sol is outrageous in price, and the new cat ban is a big turn off. Add those things in to my experiences attempting to get placed with my boyfriend, and I can't honestly tell prospective grad students that UCI housing is a good place to live.

T4

Here's a written account of the concerns I voiced at the Town Hall Meeting last week. I hope my story and others can help lead to some positive changes.

I'm in my first year at the Law School. After I committed to attending UCI for Law

School, I immediately filled out my housing application. I believe I was among the first people to fill it out as I submitted the application as soon as it was available to me. On the application, the housing office noted that housing in Verano Place would be limited, but there was no mention that it would only be open to families at turned out to be the case (until people off the waitlist were later admitted.) As a result, I still listed Verano first because it was closest to the Law School and the least expensive in hopes of getting lucky. I listed every two and three bedroom housing option as a possibility. In addition, I listed Palo Verde as my second choice figuring I would likely end up there because of the limited Verano housing. I also listed every two and three bedroom option as a possibility. In both instances, I recall putting three bedrooms first because they were the least expensive. Through my housing application, it was pretty clear that I was looking for the least expensive housing possible. The application only required two options and since those were the only two options I wanted because all the ACC properties were significantly more expensive, that is all I listed.

On May 14th, I received an email that said "Congratulations! You have been placed in Puerta del Sol..." I was furious given that my two bedroom would cost \$1,003 a month, well above what I wanted to spend so within ten minutes of receiving the email I called the number for Puerta and was told I had to call the UCI housing office. I called the housing office and was told the only thing I could do was go on the wait list for Verano or Palo Verde and risk giving up my housing guarantee, I was given no other options. In addition, that same day Puerta sent an additional email stating "While we understand that you may not have requested Puerta del Sol as your first choice, please know that the spaces in Verano Please and Palo Verde are extremely limited and we are unable to accommodate every one's request. In order to guarantee your ability to remain a part of the graduate housing guarantee, we encourage you to accept this offer as it is unlikely that Verano Place or Palo Verde will be able to accommodate you this year." I'm guessing this email was generated after many people in my situation had called the housing office to complain. That same day I also contacted the law school administration in hopes of making a change and emailed the Graduate Guarantee email as I was told to do over the phone in hope of making a change and voicing my concerns, but neither avenue was able to help. All the law school could do was increase my loans so I would be able to pay rent as they did not have my influence in the housing office. The Graduate Guarantee email led to what looked like a form response explaining how all the amenities (that I have no need for) led to the higher cost and my additional questions in a follow up email were answered with a vague response along the line of: you may be able to change housing the coming year, but you will have to go through the waitlist and we'll have lots of people to place for the Fall 2011 graduate guarantee.

In the end, I accepted my placement at Puerta del Sol because I knew I was working a job that was literally 24 hours a day that summer and would not have time to come to Irvine and search for housing. I ended up with a wonderful fellow law student as a roommate and luckily they were able to accommodate me bringing my furniture since a number of people, me included, complained about already having furniture we wanted to bring since we were expecting to live in unfurnished apartments when we originally applied for housing. The rest of the housing situation, however, has been quite frustrating. I still

feel like I am paying way too much and as an aspiring human rights lawyer I'm going to have enough trouble paying off my original loans when I take a job in the non-profit sector after law school, the additional loans I had to take out to live here make things even worse. I'm planning to do all that I can to move to Verano Place this coming year with my roommate who also doesn't want to pay this much next year, but I feel that the housing office is not at all transparent in its process and it's very difficult to figure out what I need to do to move. I also know that my fellow law students are frustrated by how much they are paying and also hope to move for the coming year to a less expensive housing arrangement.

In my attempt to figure out how to move to Verano, I was able to speak with someone at the Verano Housing office. She explained to me how I could move right now as there are four two bedroom places with only one occupant, but I would have to get permission from Puerta to break my lease which is highly unlikely given the fact that they are running well under capacity. If I try to move later so I'm not breaking my lease, there is the chance I will be able to get a place, but it seems like the only way to do so is to keep coming into the office and talking to different people who work there in hopes of being in the right place at the right time since they are still unsure whether they will just place Fall 2011 new admits in Verano or also people trying to transfer to Verano. Through this discussion I became aware of just how disjointed the housing process is as the woman I spoke with couldn't figure out whether I was actually on the waitlist or not so she said I just have to wait and see if I receive an email in March asking if I want to stay on the waitlist. I came out of the meeting not feeling like there was anything concrete I could do to secure housing in Verano other than just keep going back to the office in hopes of getting lucky with something happening in my favor.

Ultimately, I've found that the on campus housing process seems incredibly disjointed. I have received many mixed messages throughout the past year and hope that the committee looking into changing housing will be able to develop a system wherein students will be aware of what they need to do to get the housing they want and students will be on the same page as the housing office.

I hope this helps, sorry it's so long, but I thought I should be as complete as possible. Let me know if you'd like to know anything else to help voice student concerns about housing.

15

So far, nine of about forty students in our department that have moved off campus within the past year because of affordability or other housing problems. Generally, people find Verano to be affordable but other issues like pet policies, roommate problems, etc. have forced them to look off campus. Vista Del Campo is outrageously overpriced, and we have even lost potential grad student recruits because they could not afford to live in VDC on our stipend.

The consensus in our department is that we want:

- 1 - housing prices capped below \$550 / mo / person
 - 2 - greater ability to choose roommates, switch apartments within the complex
 - 3 - more lenient pet policies
 - 4 - fewer amenities, better basic maintenance (we do not need jacuzzis or over-watered grass, but plumbing that doesn't leak and better soundproofing)
 - 5 - a student oversight committee - What is our rent money paying for?
- Can we influence future big decisions within our housing communities?