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RE: Pause in Campus Village Transition to Full Graduate Student Occupancy

We, the Associated Graduate Students at the University of California, Irvine, fervently reject the proposed pause in the Campus Village transition to full graduate student occupancy. The decision to transition CV was made by former EVCP Gottfredson after careful consultation with his inclusive Graduate Student Housing Affordability Committee. This committee was chartered to address broad concerns regarding student housing that was seeded by concerns over on-campus housing costs.

While we understand that the prudent budget-driven decisions regarding next year’s undergraduate admissions composition have resulted in pressure on campus housing capacity that the University claims cannot be alleviated through other means, graduate student housing concerns have not yet been met. The CV transition was meant to address the lack of affordability by expanding capacity in mid-level rents and reducing reliance on high-cost ACC units to meet the graduate housing guarantee. Furthermore, the accommodation of a housing guarantee is not extended to all graduate students. In particular, Master’s students are excluded even as out-of-state Master’s students have been targeted as a population slated for expansion. The recourse for these students is to put their names on waitlists for on-campus housing. Even if these waitlists have 100% clearance rates, moving to UCI from out of state or even another country requires advance planning not well afforded by waitlist timelines. These students may be forced to make alternate accommodations in advance, and are structurally disincentivized from taking on-campus housing.

It has been proposed that CV has proven unpopular among graduate students due to lack of demand. We respectfully disagree. As this year is the first in which CV has been offered to graduate students, we have reason to believe that idiosyncrasies in the transition impacted awareness of CV among incoming graduate students. For example, we believe that because current graduate students were largely unaware of the CV transition, incoming students were unable to learn about the community from their future colleagues during campus visits. Furthermore, our Internal Committee has asked me to note that floor plans for CV were not available online until some time after the graduate housing request form was open for submission.

If the CV transition pause does go forward, it should be established as a one-year pause only, with the assumption that the transition is to resume on schedule in ’14-’15. If the campus would like the pause to be extended beyond ’13-’14, the issue should be first revisited by a campus work group composed of faculty and students, the relevant stakeholders in the campus community, with sufficient advance notice for responsible collection and examination of data, both institutional and student-driven. In addition to re-examining the pause of the CV transition, this committee could look into other issues pertaining to graduate affordability, including but not limited to: month-to-month rent, inclusion of pets in graduate housing, GSR stipends and housing stipends. In fact, if AGS were to be given this assurance, we would be willing to make this compromise and support a one year pause.

In moving forward, it would be mutually beneficial for all parties to seek earlier and more frequent student government consultation in the decision-making process. AGS was informed only after Student Affairs decided to propose this pause in the transition. As student consultation is one of the pillars upon
which this University was founded, this apparent lack of consideration of graduate student perspectives and consultation injures the trust AGS has built with the administration. As our desire is to couch our positions in the high standard of responsible fact-finding we have been told is required for us to make a meaningful contribution to campus governance, in the future we would appreciate any accommodations made, temporal or otherwise, that may aid us in this endeavor.

We further recommend that the capacity of Student Housing and other essential student-facing nonacademic units be discussed in any future plans for significant expansion of any segment of undergraduate or graduate student populations, and that AGS and ASUCI be involved in significant and meaningful consultation in that process.

We hailed the CV transition as a visible sign of the campus’s concern for its graduate students. Our dissent in this matter was reached only after careful consideration of campus needs, amidst a clear perception of detriment to our own graduate student interests. In the future, we fervently hope that the campus’s attention to graduate student needs will not be overlooked as they have in this manner. AGS would enjoy the opportunity to showcase active efforts on the part of campus leadership in addressing graduate student affordability concerns or making improvements to graduate student life. Especially in these difficult financial times, we feel that it is our duty to continue to remind campus leadership that a happy, mentally healthy, and well-supported graduate student body can only be a great boon to the attractiveness and competitiveness of our great University.

Sincerely,

The Council of the Associated Graduate Students