We are sending you this letter to bring to your attention serious concerns regarding the changes E&HS have proposed for the temporary food permit program that were described in a meeting between Student Affairs staff and E&HS staff on the morning of July 26, 2012. This meeting was also attended by representatives of the Office of the President of ASUCI, and the documents there obtained were shared with the Council of the Associated Graduate Students. The rationale offered for the changes stems from a purported increase in the usage of the temporary food permit program. EH&S claims that they do not have the resources to handle the current workload of food permits on this campus. A number of proposed changes were listed, and we will address each proposed change in turn, after which a summary and conclusion to our arguments will follow. We would like to comment that the document afforded ASUCI and AGS describe a general set of policies and do not make it particularly clear what is changing.

Change #1: The primary effect of this change seems to be that permits for fundraising events will only apply to an individual student group reserving a space for their own personal use—one student group could not apply for a permit for a general event involving multiple student groups. Requiring every student group to apply for separate permits may result in more applications for permits, potentially increasing the issue’s severity and certainly not ameliorating it in any way.

Change #2: This change seems to propose that no more temporary permits be issued for non-fundraising student events other than a short list of specified sponsored campus events, unless those events are overseen by “UCI professional staff.” We categorically reject this change—we see both the change itself and the deleterious effects it would have on student life as both offensive and unacceptable. Not all student groups have access to professional staff supervision. Rejection of food permits would render impossible many events that have become cultural mainstays on this campus.

Change #3: Student groups must use only “approved campus caterers” at the Bren Events Center, the Student Center, Crawford Hall and the Arc Fields, and any classrooms or auditoriums. For a caterer to become “campus approved,” there is a 30-45 day waiting period. We reject this change as unreasonably restrictive and potentially discriminatory—the general lack of most types of authentic ethnic cuisine on the list is troubling, for example. (see food.uci.edu/catering_list.php). Even if this list is being
expanded, it is impossible to have a comprehensively inclusive list, especially a list that is not student-created and driven. Yes, students can work to get their caterers onto the approved list, but we view forcing ethnic student groups to plan even further in advance and have a long waiting period to have any events involving authentic ethnic cuisine as unacceptable. Students run many annual events without the supervision of “professional staff” that celebrate UCI’s cultural and ethnic diversity—Nohruz, Chinese New Year, Diwali, and Cinco de Mayo, to name a few. Under this proposed change, students would have to make sure their caterer was “campus approved” months in advance. It is inevitable that insufficient communication of these changes and logistical impossibilities will force some of these events and countless others to simply stop happening.

We shared some of these changes with our constituents, and the response was both immediate and angry. The feedback below has been collected through conversations we have had with students on this topic in the twelve hours following the July 26 morning meeting.

1. Our position is that restrictions like those described above will inevitably stifle student life at this university. In addition, any student events rely on donations from catering companies—if these companies now must navigate a long, tiresome bureaucratic process and pay for the privilege of doing so, these donations simply will not happen.

2. We caution the campus against corporatization in its many forms. Using restrictions to push students towards UCI Catering (an organization financially tied to the corporation Aramark) is a monopolistic practice with no benefit to students. This proposed policy change will both curtail the rights of students and benefit the bottom line of an outside corporation. While we believe that selling out student interests to corporate interests was not the intent of the proposed changes, it is the practical result of the changes, and as such we cannot recommend that EH&S pursue this course of action.

3. We predict that implementation of any of these changes to the campus food permitting system (which we already view as overly bureaucratic and insufficiently permissive) would result in widespread non-compliance, exposing the campus and the students to unnecessary risk while negatively affecting both campus climate and student-administrative relations.

4. Policy changes that are made without student input violate University policies on shared governance. ASUCI/AGS representatives were not included in the discussions that determined a new policy was necessary and in the development of the new policy. Clearly this process did not meet the standards of the University of California, and we urge campus administrators to adopt a culture of seeking input from students prior to implementing changes that will impact the student experience.

5. We state that no one has the moral authority to decide which events should live and die simply on the basis of the inconvenience of implementation of onerous bureaucratic policy. As participants in this University, we should work to uphold the mission statement of the University of California, which is based on three pillars—education, research, and public service. Putting up policy roadblocks for student events is directly counter to all three of these pillars. The student view is that E&HS has, in the name of public safety, implemented food safety policies that are bureaucratic in nature and time-consuming in their implementation, and that students have participated in good faith. E&HS now holds that the very implementation that they designed is now too time-consuming to implement, so rather than removal of the policy, the formerly regulated student activity must now be prohibited. We propose instead that if E&HS no longer has the resources to continue with this set of procedures as they stand, in lieu of circumscribing student activity, they should either make their processes more efficient or remove the regulations currently in place.
We view effectively punishing students for their current compliance with the administrative policy of requesting food permits as unacceptable. Concerns over the rise of food permit requests should consider that our University has grown in size and population, and therefore, EH&S must adapt to the growing demand with simpler regulations or a streamlining of the approval process. We hold that EH&S has not provided sufficient justification for the implementation of a policy change that will so greatly and negatively affect campus life. Moreover, concerns over outbreaks of illness have not been an issue since 1992, when faculty members were stated to have been the cause, not students.

We see this policy as a disturbing reflection of a paternalistic, stifling worldview that we do not feel should reflect UCI as a whole. Eat only from an approved list of caterers. Hold only approved events. Meet only in approved, “registered” organizations. Speak only in approved zones at approved times. We see this proposal, insofar as it reflects this worldview, as incredibly short-sighted. It will negatively affect student morale. It will snub out the flourishes of culture that our many great student organizations create for this campus—on a volunteer basis—in the name of bureaucracy. This is not the university that we want UCI to be. We ask that the University place some trust in its students—just as we place our trust in the University by choosing to make it our home.

Sincerely,

Justin Chung, AGS President
on behalf of the Council of the Associated Graduate Students

Traci Ishigo, ASUCI President