



October 9th, 2023

Dear Chair of the Undergraduate Council Heather Bortfeld, Interim Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Marjorie Zatz, Chancellor Juan Sánchez Muñoz, and Interim Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer Kurt Schnier,

We are seeing a steady erosion of the quality of education provided to UCM undergraduates. Core classes, which have a proven track record to increase student retention and graduation, have been gutted through raising course caps, the creation of mega-classes, and half-term versions stripped of the very Course Learning Outcomes that prepare our students for further study. The administration has made plain, both verbally and in writing, that the simultaneous aggregation and cancellation of classes owes solely to budgetary concerns, and, having placed lecturers on the TAS (Temporary Academic Supplement), the TAS is the first to go during a shortfall, no matter how many students are harmed in the process.

The scheduled raises to student enrolment caps in the Merritt Writing Program, moreover, which would result in layoffs for Unit 18 lecturers, violate the collective bargaining agreement between UC-AFT and the university.

As numerous studies have shown, the austerity model being implemented at UC Merced erodes educational quality, reproducing the intersecting social inequalities and injustices the University of California should be working to overcome.[1] Writing programs in particular are vulnerable to austerity-based university governance,[2] given the necessarily low student enrollments these courses *require*. Watering-down the curriculum after raising course caps and laying off professors will only reinforce the language-based exclusions many of our students already face.

In fact, a study conducted by the Merritt Writing Program in summer 2022 found that Course Learning Outcomes for WRI 010, a system-wide requisite, are already not being met. Perhaps this owes to the fact that UCM writing courses are already overburdened when capped at twenty students: at the other UC semester campus, UC Berkeley, writing courses are capped at **seventeen** maximum, with some as low as **fourteen**. In other departments, such as in STEM areas, classes are being stuffed to the brim, resulting in reduced contact-hours with professors for students.

UCM is a Hispanic-Serving and Minority-Serving Institution; these changes exacerbate unjust social inequalities along lines of class, race, immigration status, and language spoken at home. Raising caps from 10% to as much as 50% not only deprives our students of needed time with lecturers but robs our students of the college education they expect and more than deserve. **We demand that UC Merced students stop being treated as second-class within the UC system. UC Merced**



students deserve a quality educational environment just as much as the students at Berkeley.

Many lecturers have been with UC Merced for over ten and fifteen years, some even helping inaugurate the university. They capacitate thousands of students a year in the fundamental science, humanities and arts competencies that mark a college education. Now, they are being told there “is no work for them” this spring and in following years, because they are on a temporary budget. Yet many are currently, individually, teaching over a thousand students a semester, and providing the crucial student support and advising students cannot get through our grossly understaffed advising office. It is apparent that UC-AFT faculty are not, in any form, temporary.

Stop sacrificing student success and lecturers’ livelihoods to the deficit. It is unjust, unfair, and incredibly short-sighted. Move unit 18 lecturers off the TAS and invest in the next generation of Californians.

Sincerely,



Katie Rodger, UC-AFT President

[1] See <https://www.worldcat.org/title/austerity-blues-fighting-for-the-soul-of-public-higher-education/oclc/944954828>

[2] <https://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/teachingwriting/article/download/22282/21853/33414>