

Broken Promises

How UC's failure to hire faculty is undermining higher education

A White Paper by the University of California Faculty Association¹



University of California
Faculty Association

**Fight for the Future
of Higher Ed.**

Summary of Findings

Faculty are experiencing increasing workloads and decreasing morale as the UC fails to keep ladder-rank hiring in pace with increasing student enrollments.

- 01 More students, fewer faculty.** For the last decade, the UC has hired only an average of 130 ladder-rank faculty across the UC system while student enrollments grew by an average 4,625 students per year. Between 2005 and 2025, the student-faculty ratio has increased from 25.5:1 to 29.6:1.
- 02 The UC falls far behind its peers.** At the Comparison 8, UCOP's peer institutions, the average student-faculty ratio is 16.5:1. The student-faculty ratio of the four public universities within this group is 21.6:1.
- 03 Greater reliance on Unit 18 teaching faculty.** The ladder-rank faculty workforce grew by about 27% between 2004-25. Unit 18 grew by 65% in the same period, mirroring nationwide trends towards hiring underpaid, contingent faculty. Unit 18 precarity impacts us, and job security for them stabilizes our workloads.
- 04 A ballooning senior administration.** The ladder-rank faculty workforce increased by 20% between 2011 and 2025, while senior administrator FTEs increased by over 100% during the same period. The current number of senior administrators exceeds the number of Senate faculty by over 3,000 positions.
- 05 Effects on faculty workloads are immense.** Faculty report declining instructional quality, the erosion of graduate education, declining TA support, increased administrative and service workloads, compromised research time, burnout, and declining morale.
- 06 UCOP's misplaced budget priorities.** The UC endowment has nearly doubled over the last five years. Its assets grew by nine cents per dollar. Yet UCOP only draws down three cents for every dollar it holds in endowment funds, compared to peer institutions, who draw down close to five cents on the dollar. Were the UC to follow the example of its peers, it could have spent another \$235 million in 2025 on research and teaching that it instead treated as an investment pool.
- 07 UCOP can afford it.** To return the student-faculty ratio to 25.5 to 1, it would cost \$219 million a year to hire our goal of 1,417 faculty across the system at the median non-clinical assistant professor salary. Given endowment growth, the current UC budget could meet UCFA's demands in a single year and return to its teaching and research mission.

Introduction

As faculty of the University of California, we are fortunate to work in the best public university in the United States — and perhaps the world.² UC faculty are renowned as leading scholars: more than 330 researchers across its 10 campuses have been named as among the most influential in their fields (i.e., authoring studies that rank in the top one percent in the number of scholarly citations worldwide).³ UC faculty researchers are at the forefront of humanistic, scientific, and technological advancement, producing new ways of studying and understanding the world, conducting research that advances the needs of underserved communities, and advancing scientific discoveries that power California's high tech sector, biotech breakthroughs, climate solutions, and life-saving medical advancements. UC faculty also foster economic mobility and workforce development by providing students access to a world-class education regardless of their income and background, educating almost 300,000 students per year.

Unfortunately, although the UC trumpets our research and teaching achievements to demonstrate the value of public higher education, as the faculty who produce that value for the university, we are experiencing progressively worsening working conditions.⁴ Over the twenty year period between 2005 and 2025, the student-faculty ratio deteriorated from 25.5 to 1 to 29.6 to 1. While student-faculty ratios are typically used as a barometer for quality of instruction, in this report we reflect on the impacts of worsening student-faculty ratios on faculty workloads. Senate faculty have a mandate to balance our cutting-edge research with teaching. Over the last two decades, however, we have experienced deteriorating research conditions. Our service loads have intensified and student enrollments have increased, yet the number of faculty in our departments has remained the same or even declined. Our teaching loads have become more burdensome due to increasing course administration workloads and decreasing student satisfaction.

“The dilution of the role of Senate faculty and research faculty potentially jeopardizes what is special about the UC experience: the opportunity for all students to access faculty who are engaged in cutting edge research.”

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND BUDGET, 2022

The UC Office of the President claims that it faces financial limitations due to both enrollment and federal funding uncertainties. The UC's 2030 Capacity Plan calls for an additional 17,000 California resident students and an overall student body of over 320,000.⁵ But despite this ambitious goal, UCOP announced in 2025 that budget uncertainties associated with the Trump administration's attacks on higher education, including proposed policy changes that threaten federal funding and anticipated budget deficits, have required a significant tightening of the belt, including a systemwide hiring freeze beginning May 2025.⁶

UCOP acknowledges that Senate faculty are the mainstay of the UC system, but Senate faculty growth has been among the slowest areas of hiring. In contrast, the number of senior administrative positions has grown rapidly.

Hiring of instructional staff has increasingly shifted towards part-time lecturers, creating an increasingly precarious professoriate. As a result, Senate faculty are getting squeezed by the UC's effort to balance the need for increasing student growth with its budget priorities.

The Academic Senate has pointed to this longstanding problem as well, most recently in a 2022 systemwide report from the University Committee on Planning and Budget. That report notes that “the dilution of the role of Senate faculty and research faculty potentially jeopardizes what is special about the UC experience: the opportunity for all students to access faculty who are engaged in cutting edge research.”⁷

The UC Faculty Associations (UCFA) concurs with this assessment and has drawn on the excellent work accomplished in the UCPB report, while updating numbers and findings to AY 2024-2025. Additionally, given our commitment and mandate to advocate for faculty on workplace issues, this report focuses in particular on the impacts of a worsening student-to-faculty ratio on faculty workloads and working conditions. We believe that this trend is unsustainable and requires a course correction. Below, we detail the need for UCOP to restore faculty hiring that can rebalance student-faculty ratios and lay out the impacts of worsening ratios on our workloads.

Our Demand

UCFA recognizes that the UC has been given a mandate by the California state legislature to increase student enrollments, particularly for in-state residents. However, UCOP has not matched increasing student enrollments with equivalent faculty hiring, affecting the quality of a UC education as well as faculty workloads.

In 2005, when the ratio for students and tenure-track faculty was 25.5 to 1, UCOP declared that “the University will not permit the student-faculty ratio to deteriorate further.”⁸ Unfortunately, the UC did not live up to this goal. Between 2005 and 2025, student-faculty ratios for tenure-track faculty across the UC system have increased from 25.5 to 1, to 29.6 to 1.⁹

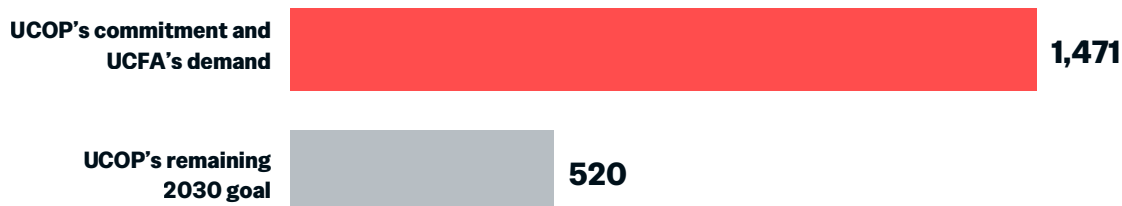
OUR DEMAND TO UCOP

Return to a student-faculty ratio of 25.5 to 1, UCOP's own upper limit for maintaining the UC's research and educational excellence.

The UC's attempts to address this problem have been modest and marked by a troubling absence of accountability. In 2019, the UC set itself a goal to increase non-recall Senate faculty by 1,100 in the four years between AY2018-19 and 2022-23, to address substantial growth in the student population. It fell far short of this goal, adding only 304 faculty in this period, due in part to pandemic budget uncertainties and an increase in faculty retirements.¹⁰ UCOP concluded in 2023 that adding 1,100 faculty “will take longer to attain.”¹¹ It then quietly shifted the goalpost, pushing the 1,100 hiring target back to 2030, giving UCOP seven more years to achieve what was an already modest faculty hiring goal.

Now, UCOP appears to be on track to meet this 1,100 goal, but this modest target is already woefully inadequate to meeting the needs of both increasing student enrollment and maintaining reasonable faculty workloads. On average, the UC has hired only 130 ladder-rank faculty across the UC system per year for the last decade, while student enrollments grew by 4,625 FTE per year. Its record year of hiring in the last decade was 2019, when 233 ladder-rank faculty were hired across the system. If the UC fulfills its 1,100 faculty hiring target by 2030, and fulfills its enrollment target of 320,000 student enrollments, the overall student-faculty ratio would still increase from 29.6 to 31.3. This is an unacceptable expansion of faculty workloads and erosion of the quality of instruction the UC provides. Therefore, hiring 1,100 faculty by 2030 — the only faculty hiring commitment UCOP has made publicly in the last six years — is far from enough. UCFA demands that UCOP instead make a plan to hire enough faculty to bring the student-faculty ratio down to its 2005 level of 25.5 to 1.

FIGURE 1. THE SIZE OF THE GAP · FACULTY HIRES NEEDED BY 2030



At the 2024–25 enrollment of 270,517 students.

To bring the ratio to 25.5 to 1 at the 2024-2025 student enrollment rate of 270,517 students, UCOP would need to hire another 1,471 faculty between 2026 and 2030 - rather than the 520 it claims it has left on its 2030 goal.¹²

Faculty Hiring at a Glance

Based on public data downloaded from the UC Info Center, below is a summary of the UC’s FTE hiring across the nine campuses of the UC system that engage in undergraduate instruction. In our data, we drew our numbers from full-time-equivalent fall student enrollments and full-time-equivalent ladder-rank faculty. We excluded ladder-rank faculty in the medical schools on the UC campuses with health sciences units, since medical ladder-rank faculty have a different set of responsibilities that are not focused on undergraduate instruction. UCOP itself excludes UCSF from its student-faculty ratios because it is a campus with no undergraduate instruction responsibilities, and we have followed their methodology.

Student-faculty Ratios have Worsened over Time

Figure 2 shows student-faculty ratios for ladder-rank faculty across the UC system have increased from 25.5 to 1 in 2004-2005 to 29.6 to 1 in 2024-2025.¹³

Table 1 breaks this down by changes in faculty and student FTEs. Over the twenty year period, student enrollments have increased by 47.6% while ladder-rank faculty have only increased by 27%.

FIGURE 2. STUDENT FACULTY RATIO TIME SERIES, 2004-2025

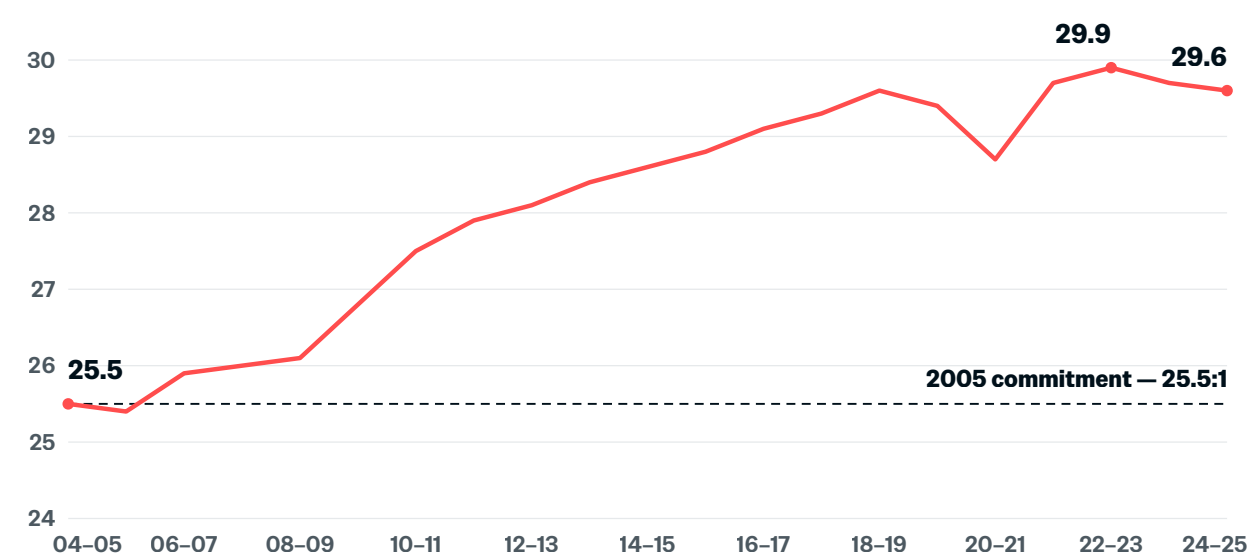
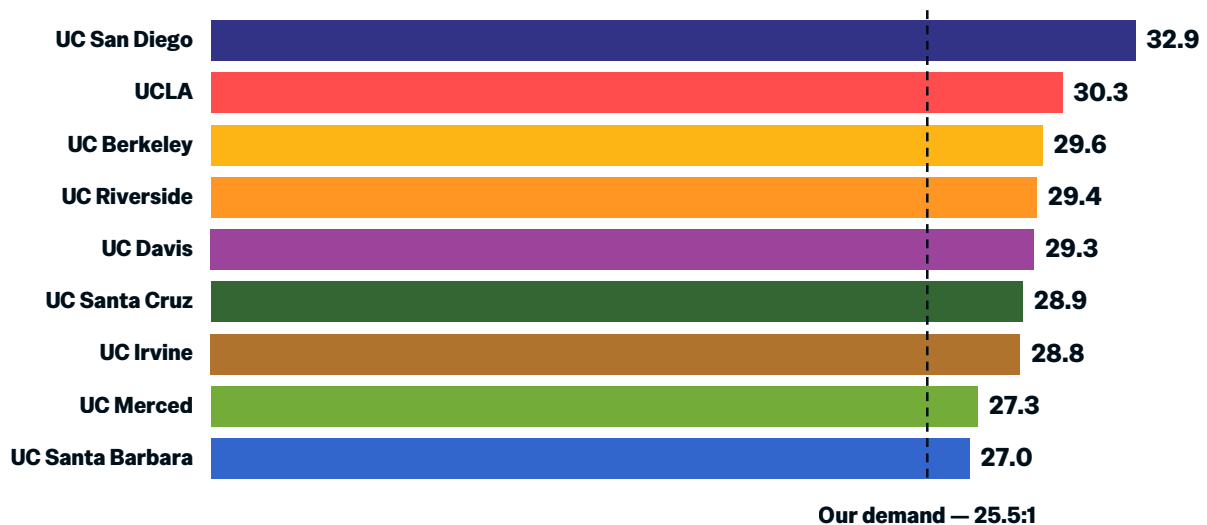


TABLE 1. UCOP STUDENT ENROLLMENTS VS FACULTY FTE, 2004-2025¹⁴

	Student FTE	Ladder-Rank Faculty FTE	Student-to-faculty ratio over time
2004-05	183,214	7,186	25.5
2006-07	190,539	7,363	25.9
2008-09	202,270	7,744	26.1
2010-11	208,073	7,574	27.5
2012-13	211,760	7,543	28.1
2014-15	224,262	7,829	28.6
2016-17	239,513	8,244	29.1
2018-19	254,643	8,607	29.6
2020-21	258,120	9,008	28.7
2022-23	263,469	8,819	29.9
2024-25	270,517	9,137	29.6
Total % increase	47.65%	27.15%	16.7%

FIGURE 3. STUDENT-FACULTY RATIOS BY CAMPUS, 2024-2025



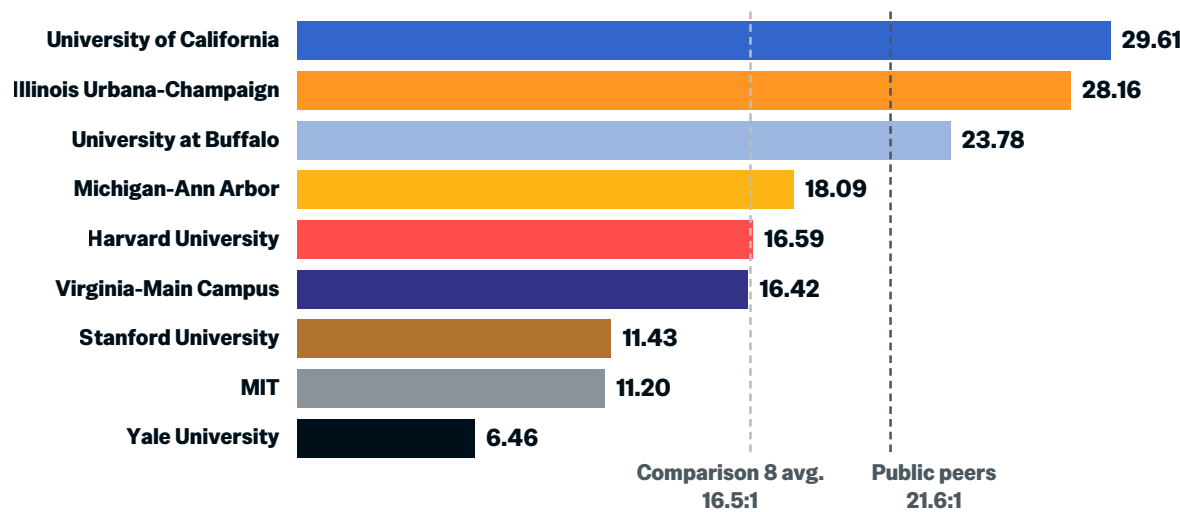
Note: UCOP's data excludes UCSF from student-faculty ratios because there is no undergraduate instruction on those campuses. It also excludes medical faculty from the total faculty FTE count. We have followed their methodology in this report.

Figure 3 breaks down student-faculty ratios by campus for the 2024-2025 academic year. On two UC campuses, UCLA and UCSD, the ratio is higher than the average across all campuses, at 30.3 to 1 and 32.9 to 1, respectively. Yet no campus has a student-faculty ratio lower than 27, a ratio far above the student-faculty ratio of comparative peer institutions in the US.

The UC Falls Far Behind Peer Institution Student-Faculty Ratios

The current UC student-faculty ratio is higher than all our peer institutions in the “comparison 8,” the eight public and private institutions that UCOP sets as its peers, as shown in Figure 4. The average student faculty ratio of the Comparison 8 is 16.5:1 relative to the UC’s 29.6:1. Were we to exclude the four private peer institutions where student enrollments are smaller and student-faculty ratios are far lower, and look only at the student-faculty ratios at the four public universities, their ratios averaged 21.6 students to one faculty, a whole 8 students lower per faculty member.

FIGURE 4. STUDENT-FACULTY RATIO COMPARISON, 2024¹⁵



Note: For each institution the number of undergraduate and graduate student FTE is divided by the number of ladder-rank faculty FTE.

To put these numbers in context, at UCSD (the UC campus with the highest student-faculty ratio), reducing the student-faculty ratio to 21.6 would require hiring 641 additional faculty given today’s student enrollment. At UCSB, which has the lowest ratio, this would require an additional 231 faculty. We are demanding that UCOP hire an additional 1,471 faculty across all UC campuses over the next 4 years.

COMPARISON 8 AVERAGE STUDENT-FACULTY RATIO	PUBLIC PEER INSTITUTIONS RATIO	UC STUDENT-FACULTY RATIO
16.5:1	21.6:1	29.6:1

Increasing Reliance on Contingent Faculty Teaching

UNIT 18 FACULTY GROWTH, 2004– 2025	LADDER-RANK FACULTY GROWTH, 2004–2025	DROP IN TT FACULTY SHARE NATIONALLY, 1987–2023	CREDIT HOURS TAUGHT BY UNIT 18 AT UC
+65%	+27%	53→32%	30–40%

To support the growth in student enrollment, UCOP has increasingly turned to part-time or otherwise non-secure teaching labor to teach student credit hours. Between 2004 and 2025, total faculty — ladder-rank and Unit 18 combined — increased by 3,048 FTE, or 34 percent. The most pronounced increase has been in Unit 18 faculty (i.e. lecturers), who grew over 65 percent during this twenty-year period. Ladder-rank faculty, in contrast, increased by 27 percent.¹⁶ This pattern mimics nationwide trends in the adjunctification of higher education. Contingent faculty constitute the majority of teaching labor in the US: about 32% of faculty members in US colleges and universities held full-time tenured or tenure track appointments in fall 2023, compared with 53% in fall 1987.¹⁷

Hiring contingent faculty to supply greater proportions of UC teaching labor has implications for both Unit 18 and ladder-rank faculty. Unit 18 faculty teach 30–40% of student credit hours, but have little say in shared governance and curricular issues. They do not serve on senate committees and are typically not assigned official department or campus service work, but frequently take on unremunerated student mentorship responsibilities and other forms of student-facing service, particularly in administering large courses. Because UCOP treats Unit 18 faculty as a flexible labor pool, many Unit 18 faculty are also only on part-time contracts, which are often against the spirit of their contract. Lecturers frequently face reductions in their appointment percentages, and are paid less for teaching more courses. Even full-time Unit 18 faculty (who teach 9 courses in the quarter system and 6 on semester-system campuses) earn substantially lower pay compared to ladder-rank faculty. Although Unit 18 faculty are unionized through UC-AFT and in recent years have gained meaningful job security provisions in their contract,¹⁸ modifications to campus temporary teaching budgets affect contingent faculty first, and layoffs have increased across the system.

For ladder-rank faculty, ballooning student enrollments and insufficient faculty hiring have increased teaching workloads as well as administrative duties. Although we are the more privileged and secure layer of faculty labor, because Unit 18 faculty do not serve on department committees, as more teaching labor has fallen to Unit 18 faculty, the share of service work that falls to senate faculty at the departmental and university levels intensifies. This includes a pileup of administrative minutiae such as scheduling, approvals, advising, compliance tasks, and program administration, as well as matters of governance and curricular significance such as serving on graduate admissions committees, chairing tenure, promotion, and search committees, serving in senate committee positions, taking on graduate student mentorship, departmental leadership positions, and much more. Hiring freezes, retirements without rehiring, and unfilled positions force remaining senate faculty to cover these duties. As the proportion of senate faculty has failed to grow commensurate with student enrollment and Unit 18 faculty over the years, ladder-rank faculty are finding themselves shouldering increasingly unsustainable service loads. This also heavily affects our research time, pulling faculty away from conducting and producing research output, the core metric by which senate faculty promotion and tenure cases are advanced.

Our demand to hire more faculty is concerned with the impacts of increasing student enrollments on both Unit 18 and ladder-rank faculty. We stand shoulder to shoulder with Unit 18 faculty in a commitment to improve both ladder-rank and Unit 18 student-teacher ratios. We are organizing to improve instructional quality by decreasing the service and workload burdens of both faculty pools. While we are concerned with the gradual erosion of job security in higher education visible in the disproportionate hiring of contingent and flexibilized faculty over the last two decades, we also firmly do not want senate FTE hiring to come at the expense of Unit 18 faculty's job security. We want more job security, better jobs, and better pay for our Unit 18 colleagues. Our demand for a net increase of Senate faculty FTE is a demand for UCOP to refocus its commitment to teaching by expanding instructional funding, not reallocating resources from existing funding. Ladder-rank faculty hiring must happen without a commensurate decrease in the budget allocation for contingent and GSI teaching labor. In addition, no hiring of ladder-rank faculty should occur at the expense of Unit 18 FTE jobs, except when an existing Unit 18 lecturer is hired into a senate line.

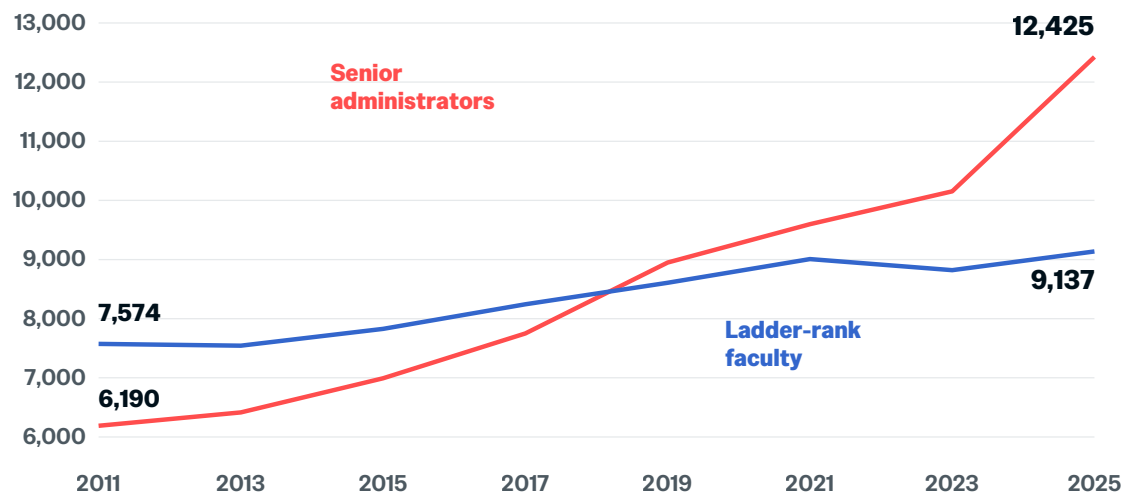
We see it as the ethical and political obligation of Senate faculty to fight for stable jobs in higher education. This means advocating for more ladder-rank faculty positions, and for ensuring that all UC faculty, Unit 18 and Senate, are equal members of the professoriate deserving of fair pay, stable careers, reasonable workloads, and a say in the governance of the institutions they serve.

Disproportionate Growth in Senior Administrative Staff

While faculty growth has remained roughly flat, the number of senior administrators at the UC has surged in the last two decades, even if we exclude the medical centers.¹⁹ Between 2011 and 2025, the number of senior administrators (a category that comprises senior management positions and management and senior professionals) has increased by over 100%. Meanwhile, the number of ladder-rank faculty has only increased by 20% even as undergraduate and graduate enrollments have increased by 30%.²⁰

Figure 5 and Table 2 define senior administrators by combining two UCOP employee categories: “Senior Management Group (SMG)” and “Management and Senior Professionals (MSP).” Such categories include senior administrators such as vice chancellors, campus counsels, and vice presidents, as well as senior managers such as assistant deans, associate and assistant vice chancellors and other administrators, and senior professionals such as senior administrative analysts, IT specialists, fundraisers, and coaches. While some of these administrative positions directly support students and faculty, faculty across the system report seeing a growing class of middle managers whose role in advancing the educational and research missions of the university does not always appear well-defined.

FIGURE 5. SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR VS. FACULTY GROWTH, 2011-2025²¹



Note: Senior administrators are defined as the sum of two UCOP employee categories: “Senior Management Group” and “Management and Senior Professionals” - both MSP-Senior Professionals and MSP-Managers.

TABLE 2. FACULTY AND SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE POSITION TABULATIONS, 2011-2025²²

	Student FTE	Ladder-Rank Faculty FTE	Unit 18 Faculty FTE	Senior Administrator FTE
2010-11	208,073	7,574	1,682.60	6,190
2012-13	211,760	7,543	1,868.90	6,416
2014-15	224,262	7,829	2,115.60	6,990
2016-17	239,513	8,244	2,295.70	7,751
2018-19	254,643	8,607	2,431.10	8,951
2020-21	258,120	9,008	2,482.80	9,600
2022-23	263,469	8,819	2,541.20	10,153
2024-25	270,517	9,137	2,578.10	12,425
Total % increase	30%	20.6%	45%	107.3%

Note: Senior administrators are defined as the sum of three UCOP employee categories: “Senior Management Group” (SMG), “Management and Senior Professionals - Senior Professionals” and “Management and Senior Professionals - Managers.”²³

If only one quarter of the additional 6,000 senior administrators hired over this period had been ladder-rank faculty, UC’s student-faculty ratio would be below our demand of 25.5 to 1.

Further, while UCOP employee data does not distinguish between faculty and student-facing staff whose work directly relates to the academic mission of the institution and those working in more administrative divisions, faculty have reported experiencing staffing shortages in the units that most directly impact our work lives. The Academic Senate’s Report on the 2024 UC Faculty and Instructor Experience Survey found that “satisfaction with administrative support has declined sharply when compared to 2022, coinciding with staff shortages and budget reallocations affecting faculty resources...Increased administrative burdens on faculty continue to create a challenging work environment, exacerbating burnout and stress.”²⁴ Thus, the hiring of senior administrators appears to be taking place largely outside of academic departments and other units that support faculty to do the core institutional work of teaching, research, and public service.

The scale of administrative growth is stark and suggests UC's misplaced budget priorities. In 2010, 6,190 staff were classified as either SMG or MSP, or about 1,400 fewer than the ladder-rank faculty total. Today, the number of senior administrators exceeds the number of faculty by over 3,000 positions. If only one quarter of the additional 6,000 senior administrators hired over this period had been ladder-rank faculty, UC's student-faculty ratio would be below our demand of 25.5 to 1.

The UC is jeopardizing its reputation as a top public university system by failing to keep up with peer institution student-faculty ratios. More importantly, the worsening student-faculty ratio points to two linked problems: first, a shift in UC budget priorities away from investing in the public mission of higher education, and second, a disregard for faculty working conditions.

UC System Budget Priorities: A Failure to Invest in the Mission

UCOP has often argued that slow faculty growth is due to state defunding of higher education. More recently, UC system leaders have projected budget deficits in the face of the anticipated loss of overhead costs from federal funds that are core to the functioning of the UC. However, while a comprehensive budget analysis is beyond the scope of this document, a look at UC investment strategies shows the university has been prioritizing the expansion of its investment portfolio for its own sake rather than using investments to support the core mission.

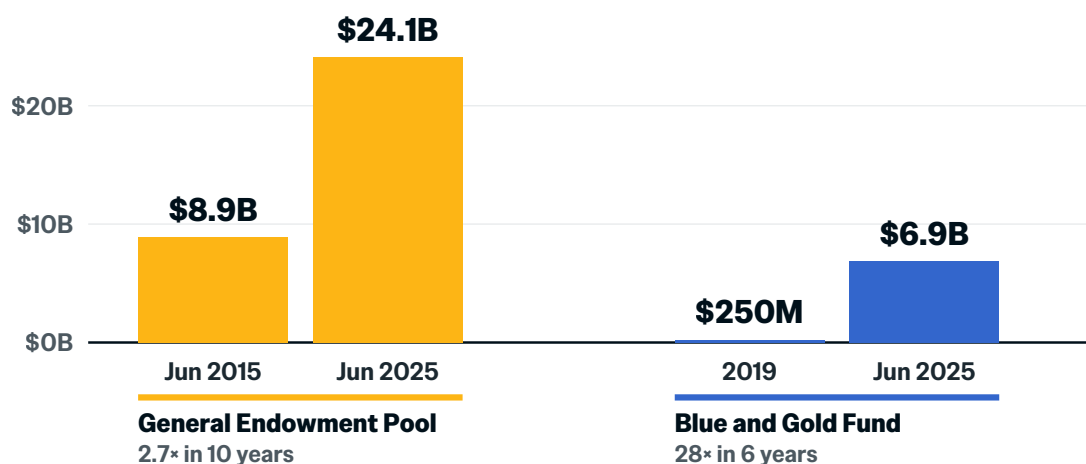
Since 2014, the volume of UC investment assets (including pension and retirement funds, working capital, and endowment pools) have almost doubled, from \$121 billion to \$217 billion.²⁵ The value of UC's endowment funds alone, however, have more than quadrupled over the past 12 years, according to a report to the Board of Regent's Investment Committee from March 2026.²⁶

The General Endowment Pool (GEP) stood at \$24.1 billion as of Jun 30, 2025, up from \$22.6 billion in the prior fiscal year—an increase of \$1.5 billion. Over the last decade, the total endowment pool (GEP + other investment pools) increased from \$8 billion (Jun 30, 2015) to \$31 billion (Jun 30, 2025)—an increase of over \$23 billion.²⁷

The General Endowment Pool 30-year annualized net return was 8.6 percent, the 20-year return was eight percent, the ten-year return was 9.7 percent, the five-year return was 9.1 percent, the three-year return was 13.2 percent, and the one-year net return was 14.7 percent.

Faculty have no shared governance over UC investments and investment income, which has become one of the sites of centralization of UCOP's power. For example, in addition to the GEP, the UC holds surplus revenues in accounts such as the Regents' Blue and Gold Fund (BGF), which was initially set up during the pandemic up as a rainy day fund which campuses can draw on in times of emergency. The BGF has now become a fund for long-term excess capital reserves, and had returns of 15.7% in 2025 due to a combination of market growth and shifting investment strategies. The BGF has grown massively since it was first started in 2019, from a starting value of \$250 million to \$6.9 billion in Jun 2025. The General Endowment Pool and BGF generate enormous returns every year.

FIGURE 6: GROWTH OF THE UC'S TWO INVESTMENT POOLS



The UC is quick to say that it cannot afford to hire more faculty. However, a closer look at budget priorities suggests otherwise. The university holds a large pool of donated money in its endowments, invests it, and each year spends a small slice of it, known as a draw down. The UC decides how big that slice will be by looking at the worth of the entire pool on average over the previous five years.²⁸ That long look-back means that the slice we take back for research and teaching is always chasing older, smaller numbers.

In practical terms, over the past five years, the endowment nearly doubled. But because the payout the UC takes out is tied to a five-year average, the money actually released never caught up. The UC ended up drawing down only about three cents for every dollar it holds in endowment funds, even as its assets grew by nine cents per dollar.²⁹ Comparable universities look back three years instead of five, and spend close to five cents on the dollar. This is the standard recommendation by National Association of College and University Business Officers, the main professional association for university finance managers, of which the UC is a member.³⁰

UC DRAW DOWN PER
DOLLAR HELD

3¢

PEER DRAW DOWN
PER DOLLAR HELD

5¢

ASSET GROWTH PER
DOLLAR HELD

9¢

SURPLUS LEFT
BEHIND

\$235M

Had UC followed the example of its peers, it would have released an extra \$150-200 million from its main endowment in 2025 alone. The Blue and Gold fund (which is drawn down even more conservatively) would have brought another \$25-35 million. In 2025, a total amount of \$175-235 million was unnecessarily left in investment accounts instead of being used for research and teaching. Note that this draw down would not have affected our endowment principal at all, which would have still grown to outpace inflation! Instead of spending down its endowment to fund the critical research and teaching objectives of its public mission, the UC has treated growing its investment pool as a goal in itself.

The UC is investing billions of dollars into purchasing hospitals and clinics, transforming UC's position as a global leader in health care research and education led by world class medical schools into a for-profit health care delivery system, acquiring eight new hospitals between 2023-25 for a cost of \$1.6 billion.³¹

Meanwhile, UCOP also continues to drain its budget on real estate purchases and construction that have not added sufficient extra classroom space nor met the housing needs of students.³² These investments require the UC to pay over a billion dollars per year in interest to service its debt.³³ UCLA, for example, has spent a total of \$1 billion on real estate purchases since the pandemic. Let's compare this to the cost of hiring ladder-rank faculty. At the median salary level, it would cost \$219 million a year to hire our goal of 1,417 faculty across the system at the median non-clinical assistant professor salary of \$154,367/year. This would fulfill UCFA's target faculty hiring demand that would bring our faculty-student ratio down to 25.5 to 1.

WHAT THE UC CHOOSES TO SPEND ON

\$1.6B

Eight hospitals
acquired between
2023 and 2025

\$1B

UCLA real estate
purchases since
the pandemic

\$1B+

Paid every year in
interest to service
its debt

\$219M

A year to hire 1,417
faculty and return
to 25.5 to 1

If the UC drew down money comparative to its peers, it could fund the hiring of thousands of new faculty immediately, bringing our ratio back to 25.5 in a single year. This small financial change would require no new state funding, no tuition increase, and no structural changes to the university's operations. Yet, the UC administration has continuously chosen to protect the size of the investment portfolio itself and the fees of the managers who oversee it, instead of the university's core academic mission.

Impacts of a Worsening Student-Faculty Ratio

A worsening student-faculty ratio is evidence that the UC administration is squeezing Senate faculty. Across the board, in conversations and surveys of UC faculty across campuses, Senate faculty report declining morale, increasing workloads, and faculty burnout. As one UCSB faculty wrote in the Sacramento Bee:

“The UC system has reached a critical breaking point. I’ve never seen anything like the demoralization or exhaustion that now permeates our campuses. It shouldn’t be like this. Our students — and the people of California — deserve better. Students are paying more and more, only to receive less and less for their money. We live in the era of the diminished degree.”³⁴

FIGURE 7. UC BERKELEY FACULTY BEAROMETER SURVEY

How many total hours do you work in a typical week during the academic term (i.e., excluding exam weeks, major grant deadlines, or holidays)?



n=177. Standard deviation 12.4. Source: Bearometer 19, Chris Hoofnagle.

In a recent faculty poll at UC Berkeley, for example, 177 faculty responded to the question of how many hours they work in a typical week with a mean of 60 hours per week, and a maximum of 105 hours per week.³⁵ The Academic Senate’s report on the 2024 University of California Faculty and Instructor Experience Survey noted that faculty were “being stretched beyond capacity by their workload, often exceeding the limits of what is reasonable or sustainable.”³⁶

In a recent UCFA survey, faculty were asked to comment on the specific workload challenges they have experienced due to worsening student-faculty ratios. Several themes recur, suggesting that worsening student-faculty ratios have created cascading effects on teaching, research, service and the overall educational mission of the UC.

Faculty reported that the ongoing erosion of the student-faculty ratio and the dilution of Senate faculty within the instructor ranks is affecting the quality of a UC education. In addition to the increased faculty workload, the higher student-faculty ratio has resulted in larger class sections; fewer opportunities for personalized interactions, undergraduate research experiences, and mentoring with faculty; and increased pressure on faculty to prepare and provide remote or dual instruction without instructional work credit or staff support for this expansion of course delivery options. The decline in the proportion of Senate faculty at UC also undermines the role of an R1 Doctoral University to deliver instruction from experts in the field.

Faculty Association Survey Results

FINDINGS	EVIDENCE
1. Faculty are teaching more students and larger classes	The most common theme is rapidly increasing enrollments without proportional growth in faculty or instructional support. Faculty describe larger lecture courses (150–800 students), expanding majors, and departments serving more students despite hiring freezes or attrition.
2. Declining TA support dramatically increases faculty workload	Many faculty report fewer TAs per student than in previous years, requiring faculty to absorb grading, student support, and course administration. Several note specific reductions in TA FTE while enrollments remained constant or increased.

FINDINGS

EVIDENCE

3. Graduate education is being weakened

Shrinking graduate programs and reduced TA allocations affect graduate recruitment, funding, time-to-degree, and the availability of graduate courses. Graduate students are increasingly diverted from research to instructional needs.

4. Instructional quality is being sacrificed to make workloads manageable

Faculty report redesigning courses to reduce grading, replacing written work with multiple-choice exams, limiting individualized feedback, increasing use of AI, and abandoning pedagogical practices they view as educationally superior. Students receive less feedback, interaction, mentoring and research opportunities. They experience overcrowded classes, delayed graduation opportunities, and diminished learning experiences. Laboratory instruction, writing-intensive courses, seminars, freshman advising, undergraduate research, and graduate seminars are cited as especially difficult to sustain under current staffing levels because they require intensive faculty engagement.

Departments report eliminating minors, reducing graduate offerings, restricting admissions, limiting course availability, and questioning the viability of degree programs because faculty capacity has not kept pace with enrollment demand.

5. Increasing administrative and service burdens

Rather than administrative work decreasing, faculty describe additional committee work, scheduling, approvals, advising, compliance tasks, and program administration, often resulting from staff shortages or organizational restructuring. Hiring freezes, retirements, and unfilled positions force remaining faculty to cover multiple programs, introductory courses, committees, and advising responsibilities, often across several departments or interdisciplinary programs.

6. Research time is displaced by teaching and administrative demands

Increased instructional and service responsibilities leave less time for grant writing, funded research, publications, and supervising research students. Several faculty explicitly link heavier teaching loads to reduced research productivity and competitiveness for external funding.

FINDINGS

EVIDENCE

7. Faculty morale, burnout, and retention concerns

Faculty describe workloads as "unsustainable," "miserable," and "absurd," expressing concern about burnout, denied sabbaticals, inability to meet expectations, and the potential loss of talented faculty to other institutions.

To illustrate these themes, below we include excerpts from faculty testimony about the effects of worsening student-faculty ratios on their workload.

Larger classes

"In the Fall 2026, I am teaching a Freshman Advising Seminar to 528 students. The intent of these seminars are to maintain small community cohorts of up to 24 students, where students learn how to work in small groups and teams, developing trust and complementing their strengths with those of their fellow students. It's really not possible to achieve these goals in a 528-student class and such a large class can't seriously be considered a seminar."

"I teach freshman chemistry at UCSD. I have around 800 students (2 groups of 400) in the fall... The students are getting a subpar education because class sizes are inflated and the teaching support is entirely insufficient."

"We are going to have to balloon all of our classes to sizes (70–100) where sustaining that level of interpersonal engagement and sense of mutual responsibility/accountability is not possible."

"I am in the social sciences. We have seen our lower-division courses max out with long waitlists at 250 and 400 students; upper-division are consistently maxing out at roughly 120 students."

Reduced TA support

"I have taught Physics 2C, a large service course on thermodynamics, optics, waves, and fluids for engineering majors, several times. My TA assignment was two 50% TAs and two 25% TAs for 350 students. I compared this TA assignment with the first time I taught Physics 2C in Winter 2020 when I had four 50% TAs and one 33% TA for 350 students as well. Thus, the TA FTE has decreased by 37%. The low number of TA FTEs made it so I had to make several changes to the exam format to reduce the grading load."

"During my job interview, I was told I would get 1 TA per 30-40 students. That number then became 60-70, then 80-100. This has led me to devote too much time to teaching prep and grading, redesign my classes on multiple occasions to reduce the grading load, and sacrifice time on research or personal matters."

"Upper-division courses have been cut from having a full TA to half a TA (20 hours/week to 10). Lower-division went from somewhere around 4-5 TAs to often 1 or 2 with a little bit of part-time or "floating" support (i.e. graduate students who rotate from week to week through grading specific assignments for different classes - which is VERY inefficient. Students from other departments have to switch to completely different classes all the time, requiring one instructor to onboard different sets of TAs at multiple junctures throughout the quarter)."

Graduate education is being weakened

"I have not taught a single topical graduate seminar in the 12 years I have been at UCLA. All of this is because UCLA has not hired ladder faculty, but insists on spreading current faculty too thin over (in my case) proliferating majors."

"We launched a PhD program in my department at the same time that I was hired (13 years ago), with a promise that we would get an additional 5 faculty to support this program. Instead, we have hovered at around 10 faculty, running both a PhD program and an undergraduate major. This means we can't offer the diversity of classes our graduate students need or provide adequate mentoring and support."

Declining undergraduate instructional quality

"Because I have fewer TAs, I had to make several changes to the exam format...emphasizing multiple-choice questions, with less opportunity for partial credit, which negatively impacted the course."

"I have seen class sizes balloon, both my own classes and across the department. I have had to adapt courses to make them more manageable, both because they are larger and because the amount of graduate support is getting cut by the school. There is no way to maintain pedagogical quality in terms of feedback and responsiveness to students when rapidly increasing demand for attention and decreasing instructional support are both at play."

"My department, Physics and Astronomy, tries to provide undergraduate research opportunities for any of our majors who want them. Fifteen years ago, more than half of our undergrads engaged in research during their time at Davis. Students still report that with enough determination they can find a spot, but I'm not sure how long that can continue. We have more and more students and fewer faculty. The remaining faculty have to shoulder more administrative work and de facto teaching increases (larger enrollments, fewer grad classes), leaving less time to supervise undergraduates. In the past year I've gotten a sharp increase in requests from students with excellent academic records and good computer skills, who would have been snapped up quickly a decade ago."

Increasing administrative and service loads

"The administrative burden is unsustainable for faculty. As more and more administrators are hired, one would think that less would be pushed down to us but it is only increasing and directly impacting the ability to designate time for acquiring funds to run our self-funded research laboratories. We will begin to (and in many cases already have) begun to lose talent to other university systems. We absolutely need to maintain our status as the world's best university system and I am afraid we are losing it to administrators."

"My appointment is in a small but thriving program connected to two larger programs. A back-to-back retirement and faculty departure has thrown the program's future into total disarray. We are down to a faculty of five and will not be able to sustain the B.A., M.A., and the two certificates we offer, despite healthy demand for each of these. Our courses routinely fill to the max. Our service load, which was already high, has become absurd. Morale is in the pits. This is not what a UC school, and R1, should be like."

"I was doing department-level service having to do with scheduling and graduate student support, and during this time, the school dramatically revised how it made scheduling decisions and graduate allocations. I had to field a lot of questions from faculty and graduate students about the sudden changes, and the school was definitely evolving its rules as we went along. The school also wanted me to do a lot of approvals of decisions where I was not consulted on available options - just a lot of, "Please approve of this action." Graduate students were very concerned about changing obligations and logistics for their work. This sometimes reached a high level of alarm because they were suddenly being asked to do things that their commuting / personal schedules did not allow. Then, we had a significant increase of graduate students seeking disability accommodations, just to reduce the pressure the school was placing on them. This was a drawn-out process where often graduate students who had been assigned and begun their TAs got approved for their accommodations mid-quarter, leaving instructors and undergraduates essentially in the lurch"

Loss of research time due to increased teaching/service

"The administrative burden is unsustainable...directly impacting the ability to designate time for acquiring funds to run our self-funded research laboratories."

"In UCSD Mathematics, we've already experienced a complete hiring freeze, and we had to rescind offers to Ph.D. students because of limited budget and lots of acceptances. I teach probability to classes of 150 undergraduates which is hard enough with a team of two TAs and a 10-hr-per-week grader. But if our budget gets cut by 8%, I know we'll have even less support with teaching and grading. In addition to teaching, I'm research-active and the recent federal funding cuts mean that less grant funding will be coming in. I'll survive but my research productivity will probably fall by 50% of my normal paper count per year."

Faculty burnout

"Our service load...has become absurd. Morale is in the pits."

"Faculty meetings, FECs, committees, advising across all three of the programs in which I teach, let alone teaching, is impossible. It is miserable."

"We were recently told in a faculty meeting that if anyone who teaches a core required lab class takes a sabbatical, many students will not be able to graduate on time. It was intimated that my next sabbatical request will probably be denied. Course buyouts are categorically refused, 'at any price.' Our entire department, and the school, recognizes that this is unsustainable."

"We will begin to (and in many cases already have) begun to lose talent to other university systems."

"Slapping budget cuts and hiring freezes on top of all the other recent changes feels like hitting us hard when we're already down and need support more than ever."

"Faculty meetings, FECs, committees, advising across all three of the programs in which I teach, let alone teaching, is impossible. It is miserable."

UCFA FACULTY SURVEY, 2026

Conclusion: Hire More Faculty

Ladder-rank faculty are the very core of an academic institution. While many other workers provide critical support for the UC's mission of teaching, research, and public service, these functions are our primary responsibility. A university is simply not a university without its faculty, and when faculty are under-resourced and overworked, the mission suffers. The quality of education we are able to offer, the creativity and impact of our research, and our ability to serve the people of California are all being undermined by UC's failure to invest in growing its faculty.

Over the past two decades, the UC has steadily decentered and disempowered faculty and prioritized hiring and investment in other areas, including administrators, hospitals and real estate. At the same time, the number of students has grown, leading to a student-faculty ratio that is now the worst amongst our peers (see Figure 4).

In 2005 when the student-faculty ratio was 25.5, UCOP declared that "the University will not permit the student-faculty ratio to deteriorate further."³⁷ Today, the ratio sits at 29.6. This is unacceptable and must be addressed. The UC needs to make a commitment and a plan to hire ladder-rank faculty, returning to the 25.5:1 student-faculty ratio. This reinvestment in the faculty is not only possible, but it is necessary if the UC wants to continue to be a world-class research university.

Further, enacting a robust faculty hiring initiative within such a varied institution requires faculty participation. For that reason, we insist that faculty have a seat at the table to formulate the plan and see to its implementation.

A binding plan

A binding commitment to hire ladder-rank faculty, returning to the 25.5:1 student-faculty ratio.

A seat at the table

An elected, representative faculty committee to negotiate with UCOP.

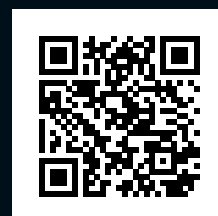
Real accountability

Faculty take part in implementation and subsequent oversight.

This is what organizing can win.

Join your FA today and ask three colleagues to sign the petition.

ucfaculty.org/join



SIGN THE PETITION!

Sources & Notes

- 1.** The primary authors of this report were Charmaine Chua, Miloš Jovanović, Jessica Taft, Sam Smucker, Max Buchholz, Toby Higbie, and Annie McClanahan. Faculty Association members on all 10 campuses offered feedback and input. Corresponding author: chchua@berkeley.edu
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- 3.** 2022 Highly Cited Researchers, Clarivate (clarivate.com/highly-cited-researchers/)
- 4.** <https://accountability.universityofcalifornia.edu/2025/chapters/chapter-9.html#a9.2.2>
- 5.** “University of California 2030 Capacity Plan” https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/uc-2030-capacity-plan.pdf
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- 7.** UC Planning and Budget Committee (UCPB) Report on Faculty Hiring, 2022, 10. https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/_files/reports/sc-md-report-on-faculty-hiring.pdf
- 8.** University of California, 2004-2005, Budget for Current Operations. 10.
- 9.** See “Student Faculty Ratios,” “Ladder-Rank & Equivalent (LRE)” at <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-uc/information-center/academic-staffing-ratios>
- 10.** 5.3 in <https://accountability.universityofcalifornia.edu/2023/chapters/chapter-5.html>
- 11.** Page 4 of <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/nov23/b3attach1.pdf>
- 12.** UCOP’s 2030 goal of hiring 1,100 faculty by 2030 is actually a goalpost that shifted from its initial hiring goal of 1,100 by 2022. In 2025, UCOP reported that it had hired 580 ladder-rank FTE since it set the goal in 2019, leaving 520 faculty left to hire to hit the goal. UCFA argues that this goal is far from adequate. <https://accountability.universityofcalifornia.edu/2025/chapters/chapter-5.html#a5.3.5>
- 13.** See “Student Faculty Ratios,” “Ladder-Rank & Equivalent (LRE)” at <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-uc/information-center/academic-staffing-ratios>
- 14.** Our data for student, ladder-rank equivalent (LRE) faculty, and senior administrator FTE growth is downloaded from the UC Info Center. We calculated student enrollment via fall FTE enrollment; and LRE faculty on the basis of ladder-rank faculty on general campuses (excluding all health sciences faculty primarily appointed on the medical campuses, and excluded UCSF altogether, as they do not teach undergraduates. This is consistent with how UCOP calculates its student-faculty ratios). Source data: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/academic-staffing-ratios>
- 15.** Data Source: IPEDS, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/>. IPEDS data is submitted to NCES by universities under federal reporting requirements. We have used this dataset for all comparison peer institution data.
- 16.** Data source: UC Info Center, Academic Staffing Ratios, 2004-2025. We excluded medical center faculty from all counts. <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-uc/information-center/academic-staffing-ratios>
- 17.** Tenure and Contingency in US Higher Education, Fall 2023. <https://www.aaup.org/academe/issues/spring-2025/data-snapshot-tenure-and-contingency-us-higher-education-fall-2023>
- 18.** UC-AFT, “Reappointments and Career Pathways,” https://ucaft.org/member_resource/reappointments-and-career-pathways/
- 19.** If we include the medical centers and Agricultural and Natural Resources, the number of senior administrators has increased from 8,831 to 22,211 between 2011 and 2025, an increase of over 150%
- 20.** Note that the period of comparison for administrative vs. ladder-rank growth is 2011-2025, while the period of comparison for unit 18 faculty vs. senate faculty growth in the preceding sections is 2004-2025. We were unable to get longer range data from UCOP for administrative statistics and have thus adjusted the percentages accordingly .
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- 22.** Data Source: UC Information Center, UC Employees, FTE. <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-uc/information-center/uc-employees-full-time-equivalent-fte>

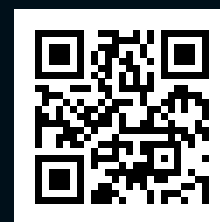
- 23.** Because no data is available for the “MSP Managers” category in the UC Info Centers’ Academic Staffing Ratios data, which pertains most directly to student-faculty ratios on undergraduate instructional campuses and has data available from 2004–2025, we have drawn from the UC Employees FTE data instead for the total number of senior administrators, where data is only available from 2011.
- 24.** Report on the 2024 University of California Faculty and Instructor Experience Survey, https://Senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/_files/reports/report-on-2024-uc-faculty-instructor-experience-survey.pdf
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- 26.** UCOP, “INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2025 (FISCAL YEAR 2025–26),” <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/mar26/i1.pdf>
- 27.** UC Annual Endowment Report Fiscal Year 2014–2015, https://www.ucop.edu/investment-office/_files/report/UC_Annual_Endowment_Report_FY2014-2015.pdf; UC Annual Endowment Report Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2025, <https://www.ucop.edu/investment-office/investment-reports/annual-reports/annual-endowment-report-2024-25.pdf>
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- 29.** Effective annual distribution yield dropped toward the ~3.0% mark, even as our endowment grew by 9.1% per year over a 60-month period. The GEP fixed drawdown to a 60-month spending rate meant that the UC drew down \$710 million for an endowment pool of \$22.6 billion, or 3.14% in 2024. For the Blue and Gold fund, the 2024 draw down was \$175 million for a fund of \$6.9 billion, or 2.54%. The combined effective draw down of both endowment pools was %2.97. Data from: <https://invest.universityofcalifornia.edu/results>
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