

24 May 2020

Robert C. Robbins, President
Liesl Folks, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs & Provost
Lisa Rulney, Senior Vice President for Business Affairs & Chief Financial Officer
Helena Rodrigues, Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer
Andrew Carnie, Dean of the Graduate College

Dear Dean Carnie and Senior Campus Leaders,

We write as the Steering Committee of the Coalition for Academic Justice at the University of Arizona (CAJUA) to express our support of the UA Graduate Student Coalition letter dated April 29, 2020 and included here. We request a thorough and prompt response to the concerns raised therein as well as on-going dialogue and collaboration between relevant Task Forces and the Graduate Student Coalition.

The CAJUA is a newly-formed campus organization comprised of hundreds of UA employees who have been meeting regularly since President Robbins released his administration's original furlough and pay reduction plan. Our coalition emerged organically across a number of structural differences: staff, graduate students, and faculty of all ranks and representing various degrees of job (in)security. Our mission is to work across these differences in order to preserve our ability—stretched thin though it is—to carry out our responsibilities as a land-grant institution, as a newly designated Hispanic Serving Institution, and as a major R1 public flagship University residing on the traditional territory of the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe.

The UA Graduate Student Coalition is a graduate student-led group that also has emerged in response to the financial crisis at the university. The UAGSC is responding in various ways to the forms of structural precarity graduate students face, conditions that long preceded the current crisis and are rendered ever more acute by the present circumstances.

Please understand that our graduate students are not alone; when they address their concerns to you, they do so with the full backing of the CAJUA's broad coalition. We affirm the following:

- Our graduate students are not dependents, or as Provost Folks said in a recent town hall meeting, “mouths to feed.”
- Graduate students contribute their research and pedagogical expertise; they occupy multi-valent positions in our institution that include the roles of researcher & instructor, student & employee, colleague & mentee, institutional ambassador & future standard-bearer of the UA's mission.
- The Graduate Student Coalition has surveyed hundreds of graduate and professional students and held an online Town Hall for their constituency, one in which graduate students were invited to speak and be heard. These initiatives are to be commended for filling the void of inclusive leadership left by the Graduate College and by UA's Executive Leadership Team.
- From among the concerns emerging from the Graduate Student Coalition survey and Town Hall, we want to highlight that graduate students should not be assumed to be available shields for faculty during reentry, with professors using Zoom to attend class and graduate students expected to increase their exposure to Covid-19 by being physically present in the classroom (as President Robbins recently described to Arizona Public Media).
- The Graduate Student Coalition is currently working with representatives of GPSC. However, given the urgency of their concerns, and the current turnover in leadership of GPSC, these circumstances call for other channels of communication and a response from the administration.

- As such, we respectfully request that the university administration open a channel of communication with the UA Graduate Student Coalition as soon as possible. Graduate students are living in a state of uncertainty and financial precarity. Your prompt and direct formal response to their concerns is paramount. While you may feel that you are responding to these concerns through efforts like the Town Hall and web resources, a formal outlining of your responses to their concerns would be the most effective and respectful way to move forward.
- Your formal and informal discourse sets the tone and culture of our school. Precisely in this time of stress and crisis we respectfully ask that you codify, in messaging and policy, the high esteem and appreciation that guides all aspects of our work with graduate students.
- The increased investments demanded of faculty and staff in the form of furloughs and pay reductions, and the increased risks demanded of graduate students in the form of newly finite and potentially reduced funding, require commensurate increases in accountability and collaboration on the part of our senior leadership team.
- As such, and most urgently, we affirm the need for the confirmation of fall appointments and a task force dedicated to identifying and addressing graduate and professional student issues and includes graduate student representatives.

Sincerely,

The CAJUA Steering Committee