

# ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GRADUATE STUDENT MISTREATMENT BY FACULTY ADVISORS

## UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA STUDENT ASSOCIATION RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS graduate students help sustain the University of California by producing primary research with national and international impact,<sup>1</sup>

WHEREAS graduate students are instrumental in the higher educational pipeline, most commonly recognized as teaching assistants and instructors of record,

WHEREAS graduate students are in close relationships with advisors, co-advisors, mentors, principal investigators, supervisors, or other faculty sponsors (hereafter referred to as “**advisors**”), and are dependent upon the support of these advisors to complete their degrees,

WHEREAS the graduate student-advisor relationship is a basic example of a power dynamic, within which students are pressured to comply with the directives of advisors at the expense of other concerns,

WHEREAS graduate student mental health is critical to graduate student well-being, academic performance, post-graduation success, and broader campus climate,

WHEREAS a 2014 study on graduate student mental health and wellbeing at UC Berkeley found alarming levels of depression among UC Berkeley graduate students (47% of PhD students and 37% of Master’s students) and that advisor relationship was among the top predictors of graduate student depression and low satisfaction of life,<sup>2</sup>

WHEREAS a 2014-2015 UC Davis Ombuds Report cites abuse of power and mistreatment of graduate students as a *systemic concern* within the university, suggesting training in implicit bias and conflict resolution/communication to prevent further abuse<sup>3</sup>,

WHEREAS such abuses are left unaddressed due to students’ dependence on advisor, which includes fear of losing support from advisor or department, fear of public disparagement by someone with an established career in a field the student would like to pursue, reliance on funding from sources to which the advisor is tied, and fear of stigmatization or judgement by department or community,

WHEREAS homosocial reproduction replicates existing organizational structure and allows organizational bias by favoring and selecting incumbents who share a common background,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “UC grad students talk straight to win big”, University of California,

<http://universityofcalifornia.edu/news/students-graphene-research-cinches-2016-grad-slam-win>

<sup>2</sup> “Graduate Student Happiness & Well-Being Report | 2014,” The UC Berkeley Graduate Assembly.

[http://ga.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/wellbeingreport\\_2014.pdf](http://ga.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/wellbeingreport_2014.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> “2014-2015 Annual Report”, UC Davis Office of the Ombuds.

[http://ombuds.ucdavis.edu/local\\_resources/docs/2014-15%20Annual%20Report.pdf](http://ombuds.ucdavis.edu/local_resources/docs/2014-15%20Annual%20Report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Dressel, P., Hartfield, B. W., & Gooley, R. L. (1994). Dynamics of Homosocial Reproduction in Academic Institutions, *The. Am. UJ Gender & L.*, 2, 37.

WHEREAS accordingly, personal differences, including cultural, gender, racial, ethnic, ideological, or epistemological differences, can result in dramatically reduced support for certain graduate students,

WHEREAS graduate students of groups that are underrepresented in academia, particularly African-Americans, Latino/as, certain international populations, and women, are more likely to face bias in higher education as a result of subconscious and conscious attitudes and beliefs about their relative intellectual capabilities,<sup>5 6</sup>

WHEREAS discriminatory structures at the organizational-scale promote low acceptance rates of underrepresented minority groups<sup>7</sup>, which serves to exacerbate social isolation among groups already biased against in academia,

WHEREAS independent of strong specific biases, bullying behavior is pervasive in power hierarchies such as academia, and contributes to lack of support for graduate students of any and all backgrounds,

WHEREAS in addition to a wide range of serious emotional abuses, adverse faculty actions may include delaying degree progress, refusing to write or writing poor letters of recommendation, slandering students within and outside of the department, failure to nominate student for promotion, and general failure to advocate on behalf of the student,<sup>8 9</sup>

WHEREAS these injustices faced by some graduate students are often in combination with arduous course, research, and teaching loads,

WHEREAS in most departments annual reviews of graduate student progress are conducted by faculty members without reciprocal input from graduate students about the advisor,

WHEREAS this reinforces the existing power dynamic and further silences student input, denying students an important form of active participation in their educational outcomes,

WHEREAS in many departments annual reviews of graduate students are not shared with the graduate student about whom the review is written, suggesting a lack of commitment to open communication and student development,

WHEREAS course evaluations are required to hold instructors accountable for their standard of teaching in a classroom setting, but no such requirement is in place for graduate student-advisor relationships,

WHEREAS faculty members have incentive to protect one another and maintain social cohesion within the department, which often means allowing mistreatment of graduate students to be undocumented, and

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<sup>5</sup> Gutiérrez y Muhs, G., Niemann, Y. F., Gonzalez, C. G., & Harris, A. P. (2012). Presumed incompetent: The intersections of race and class for women in academia.

<sup>6</sup> Hyun, J., Quinn, B., Madon, T., & Lustig, S. (2007). Mental health need, awareness, and use of counseling services among international graduate students. *Journal of American College Health*, 56(2), 109-118.

<sup>7</sup> Pager, D., & Shepherd, H. (2008). The sociology of discrimination: Racial discrimination in employment, housing, credit, and consumer markets. *Annual review of sociology*, 34, 181.

<sup>8</sup> "Dealing With Abuse in Grad School", GradHacker Blog, <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/dealing-abuse-grad-school>

<sup>9</sup> "What To Do When Your Academic Advisor Mistreats You", Cheeky Scientist, <http://cheekyscientist.com/academic-advisor/>

importantly, unaddressed (with the underlying logic including that graduate student turnaround is faster than that of faculty members with whom faculty may work for years or decades)

WHEREAS the ability of students to individually as well as collectively have a say in their education and act to reverse the conditions that led to their negative experiences and trauma is empowering,

WHEREAS information about treatment of graduate students by faculty advisors is not readily available for prospective students who should rightfully wish to avoid counterproductive and emotionally damaging experiences,

WHEREAS recent scandals regarding sexual harassment across the UC have exposed what one harassment victim calls a “culture of intimidation, harassment, silence and fear of retaliation,”<sup>10</sup>

WHEREAS University Chancellors and leadership at University of California Office of the President (UCOP), in light of recent sexual harassment scandals involving faculty members abusing their power over students and staff, have expressed a desire to shift the culture on campuses that allow such abuses to go unchecked,

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WHEREAS although the graduate student-advisor issue is familiar to many administrations, and some of which attempt to address the problem with positive reinforcement for good mentorship, the persistence of graduate student abuse shows that positive reinforcement incentives fall short, especially when faculty members feel their mentorship “style” is appropriate,<sup>12</sup> and when faculty members feel there will be no consequences for their actions,

WHEREAS successful outcomes result from work environments that recognize and reinforce the importance of quality mentorship, progress toward degree completion and toward career objectives,

WHEREAS the practice of “reciprocal accountability” between advisor and advisee is a mechanism enforced in some programs to create such an environment of success and student well-being,<sup>13 14</sup>

WHEREAS the authors of this resolution feel that the suggestions below would be a key step forward in shifting the culture on UC campuses from one where graduate students feel disempowered to report conflict and potential abuses and where faculty members and other mentors feel confident that reports of mistreatment will go without consequence, to one where graduate students feel empowered to speak about their experiences and where faculty advisors know that there are meaningful mechanisms in place to check their power over graduate students,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the UCSA requests that the University of California Office of the President (UCOP), including its Council of Graduate Deans (CoGD) which represents Graduate Divisions across the UC, in coordination with the University of California Student Association (UCSA), implement a four-part

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<sup>10</sup> “Amid Mounting Complaints, UC Berkeley Vows To Fix Campus Sexual Harassment,” Newsweek.  
<http://www.newsweek.com/uc-berkeley-sexual-harassment-complaints-448489>

<sup>11</sup> “Napolitano: UC Berkeley must lead change in sex harassment culture,” San Francisco Chronicle.  
<http://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Napolitano-UC-Berkeley-must-lead-change-in-sex-7235203.php>

<sup>12</sup> “2014-2015 Annual Report,” UC Davis Office of the Ombuds.  
[http://ombuds.ucdavis.edu/local\\_resources/docs/2014-15%20Annual%20Report.pdf](http://ombuds.ucdavis.edu/local_resources/docs/2014-15%20Annual%20Report.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Yeatman, A. (1995). Making supervision relationships accountable: graduate student logs. *Australian Universities' Review, The*, 38(2), 9.

<sup>14</sup> “UC Davis Schools of Health Mentoring Academy.” <https://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/mentoring/>

response to graduate student mistreatment by faculty advisors systemwide that includes the aims of 1. Public Acknowledgement and Condemnation, 2. Institutionalization of Reciprocal Review toward Graduate Student Success, 3. Data Collection and Accountability Reporting, and 4. Mentorship Training for Faculty, as follows,

RESOLVED, in accordance with Aim One, the UCSA requests that the CoGD publicly condemn abuse of graduate students by advisors in written form, reinforcing that graduate student mistreatment is unacceptable within the UC, and demonstrate “in no uncertain terms” that “fair treatment of students [is] to be a higher priority than the research money and institutional prestige held by intractable faculty members”,

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RESOLVED, in accordance with Aim Two, the UCSA requests that the UCOP CoGD and Graduate Studies Division staff, work with the UCSA President and Graduate/Professional Committee, using guidance from ombuds' reports from UC campuses, to develop a standardized reciprocal evaluation process (SREP) in all departments with graduate students in the UC system, that prioritizes transparency, faculty accountability, graduate student success and well-being, and provision of qualitative and quantitative data for reporting purposes,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the SREP shall include that any institutionalized review of students by faculty within the SREP must be shared and discussed with students in a timely manner, and that these annual reporting periods may be used as opportunity to assess timelines and progress toward degree completion with parties external to a student's' graduate committee,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that graduate students, who may feel vulnerable due to their relative lack of power in these academic and professional hierarchies, may choose to opt out of sharing some or all of their formal reviews with advisors or departments, but shall submit reviews to the Graduate Division, and may request mediation for grievances to be overseen by Graduate Divisions,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that department chairs should encourage the development and maintenance of academic and working environments free of mistreatment and should be held responsible for taking appropriate action when information about potential mistreatment or grievances are submitted to the department, including via enforcing the SREP,

RESOLVED, in accordance with Aim Three, once the SREP is developed, campus graduate divisions (under the CoGD) shall be responsible for retrieving and analyzing SREP data from each department,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that data without personal identifiers shall be made public and easily accessible online through UCOP as an "Annual Sub-Report on Graduate Student-Advisor Relationships", for system-wide evaluation and for the benefit of prospective students,<sup>16</sup>

RESOLVED, in accordance with Aim Four, the UCSA requests that all faculty advisors undergo a mentorship training program with emphasis in conflict management, communication, and implicit bias, to be developed by UCOP in consultation with bodies dealing with conflict resolution in the UC such as university ombuds' offices, and with the UCSA President and UCSA Graduate/Professional Committee,

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<sup>15</sup> “2014-2015 Annual Report”, UC Davis Office of the Ombuds.

[http://ombuds.ucdavis.edu/local\\_resources/docs/2014-15%20Annual%20Report.pdf](http://ombuds.ucdavis.edu/local_resources/docs/2014-15%20Annual%20Report.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> See other UCOP reports at <http://www.ucop.edu/graduate-studies/accountability-reports/index.html>

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that faculty members who have received poor student reviews based on an established standard shall be required to complete more comprehensive trainings (e.g. in-person as opposed to online, higher quantity and/or quality),

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that advisors who have received multiple poor reviews are requested to have this documented for consideration in tenure review files or for other promotional processes,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the UCSA requests that Graduate Divisions continue to monitor admission of graduate students of different underrepresented groups following implementation of a system-wide standardized reciprocal evaluation process to monitor whether there are any changes in admissions profiles,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, UCSA President and UCSA Graduate/Professional Committee Chair shall present this resolution to UCOP graduate liaisons, including the Chair and members of the CoGD and the staff Director of UCOP Graduate Studies, by May 13, 2016, and shall re-introduce this resolution to UCOP at the beginning of the 2016-2017 academic year, in order to work together toward development and implementation.

THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, UCSA External Vice Presidents shall present this resolution to their student assemblies at the beginning of the 2016-2017 academic year in accordance with the UCSA Graduate and Professional Student Agenda.