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SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

ACADEMIC SENATE, MERCED DIVISION
GRADUATE COUNCIL (GC)

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED
5200 NORTH LAKE ROAD
MERCED, CA 95343

July 16, 2020

**To: EVC/Provost Camfield
Interim VPDGE Kello**

From: Graduate Council Chair Westerling and Vice Chair Hratchian

Re: Daycare and COVID-19 Impacts on Graduate Students

Lack of daycare options due to the COVID-19 pandemic is seriously impacting UC Merced graduate students' and postdoctoral scholars' capacity for research, teaching, and coursework.

Student and postdoctoral caregivers, especially single parents and those with partners who are not co-located, or who are also full-time students and workers, have few options. We are anecdotally aware of students who have withdrawn from summer instructional employment due to lack of daycare options. Additionally, there are many students and postdocs with newborns and young children whose extended family cannot provide direct assistance because of travel restrictions.

Our students and postdoctoral scholars are particularly vulnerable as many lack alternative resources to compensate for lost income or hire at-home daycare providers. Many lack connections to the local community and are cut off from distant support networks.

The fact that we made it through the Spring semester shutdown does not imply that the current situation is sustainable or that our graduate students and postdoctoral scholars have the means to successfully teach, attend class, or fully engage in their research this Fall.

A particular concern is that grant funding for student and postdoc research may be expended before projects can be completed, that additional funding may be difficult to obtain in the oncoming depression, and demand for TA-ships may exceed available funding as graduate student time to degree is extended and undergraduate enrollments fall below targets. We face the very real prospect of a sharp decrease in completion rates and increased debt loads, with disproportionate impacts on female students and postdocs, students and scholars of color, and first-generation students.

Standing up daycare options for our students could be one of the most impactful measures we can take with respect to equity, completion rates, and support for sponsored research.

Cc: GC
Graduate Group Chairs
Senate Chair Hansford
Senate Vice Chair DeLugan