FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GSA Presidential Statement Delivered at June 3rd, 2019 Meeting With Chancellor Block

June 3rd, 2019 --- On June 3rd, 2019, I, Zak Fisher, President of the UCLA Graduate Students Association, attended a meeting with UCLA Chancellor Gene D. Block and Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Monroe Gorden. I was told that the meeting would not and may not be audio recorded and that no official written minutes would be taken. For the sake of transparency and accountability, values indispensable to a public institution in the United States of America, I hereby make public my introductory remarks spoken to those in attendance:

“Thank you, Mr. Chancellor and Mr. Vice Chancellor, for this opportunity to meet with you on behalf of my constituents, 13,968 outstanding graduate students.

A few months ago, in the midst of my campaign for GSA president, I stood before hundreds of my peers at the GSA Elections GradBar. I told my peers what message I would deliver to you if given the chance as GSA President.

The message I promised to deliver is that it is time that this public school reaffirmed its public mission.

I do believe that UCLA is the finest institution of higher learning in the world. However, UCLA is a public school that has betrayed its public mission in ways that tangibly affect graduate students and all workers at this institution.

It is a betrayal of our public mission to build luxury hotels disguised as conference centers while graduate students go hungry and homeless.¹

Graduate students cannot afford University Housing with the resources the university provides them. In the words of an unsolicited note one of my constituents recently sent me, UCLA’s housing policies ‘demonstrate clear discrimination against disadvantaged students without the financial means to pay rent.’

UCLA’s own data show that most graduate students do not have the resources to cover their basic necessities, such as food, housing, and medicine.\textsuperscript{2} Students struggle to meet these needs while administrative positions have tripled in less than two decades\textsuperscript{3} and ‘executive’ administrators receive salaries placing them among the top 1% of all United States income earners. As a public institution, we have an obligation to distribute our resources more equitably. This is a public school; it must not be an oligarchy.

It is a betrayal of our obligation to be accountable -- an obligation instilled in our True Bruin Values\textsuperscript{4} -- to insist that meetings such as this are not recorded by audio device or written minutes. I am disturbed by the administration’s insistence that discussion on matters of public concern at this public school not be preserved for the record.

It is a betrayal of our public mission to negotiate in bad faith with the various labor unions that strengthen our school and protect its workers. Every single employee of this school, including graduate student workers of all types, must be guaranteed substantial workplace rights and protections. Organized labor deserves our respect, and we should take all workers’ concerns seriously. Every student and worker here has the right to unionize and make their voices heard.

It is a betrayal of our public mission to say that student voices will be honored and then proceed to take a course of action in radical opposition to overwhelming student consensus. The administration’s insistence on implementing Policy 133, an Orwellian police surveillance initiative, presents one example. The recent rejection of a candidate for dean at Anderson School of Management, despite overwhelming student support for his candidacy, presents another example.

UCLA is rightly held up by many as the finest public institution of higher learning in the United States of America. It is for this reason that we have an obligation to lead by example when it comes to radically affirming our public mission. We are all here to serve the public. It is the public’s blood and sweat that is transfigured into the tax revenue that lights our lamps and waters our lawns.

It is time that this school becomes a place where any member of the public, not just the wealthy and the well-connected, can obtain a world class graduate education. As a start, that means it is time for lowering rent, providing affordable childcare, and guaranteeing timely mental health services for all graduate students. I look forward to working with you and your respective teams to find ways we can take meaningful steps toward affirming our public mission.

Sincerely,
Zak Fisher

\textsuperscript{2} This data was presented to me in my capacity as graduate student representative on the UCLA Student Fee Advisory Committee.
\textsuperscript{3} https://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-uc-spending-20151011-story.html
\textsuperscript{4} https://truebruin.ucla.edu/