On December 6, 2017, the Skirball Fire charred more than 150 acres in the Bel Air neighborhood of West Los Angeles. The City of Los Angeles immediately ordered a mandatory evacuation for the area east of the 405 Freeway, south of Mulholland Drive, west of Roscomare Road, and north of Sunset Boulevard. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti has also declared a state of emergency for the Skirball Fire.

Although UCLA is situated less than a mile away from the fire, the administration issued a notice in the early morning to declare that campus will remain open and some classes would still meet. It was not until later in the morning that the administration decided to cancel classes for the day effective at 12:00pm; and this decision was not communicated to many students via Bruin Alert until over 90 minutes later at 12:04pm, after they had already needlessly fought traffic and polluted air to get to class.

Many graduate students woke up to the smell of smoke, only to be confused as to whether they were required to attend their mandatory classes or research sessions. While we understand that closing the campus would result in a large economic loss for the university and logistical challenges for the administration, this in no way justifies putting student, faculty, and staff lives at risk.

When nearby LAUSD schools and Santa Monica College canceled classes and closed their campuses for the day, the UCLA administration remained reluctant to follow suit. The fact that graduate students continued to travel to campus in the midst of this emergency demonstrates the degree of their devotion to their studies, teaching, and research. It is the university’s responsibility to make certain they are not put in physical jeopardy in the course of these duties. Today, the university let its graduate students down by failing to prioritize this responsibility.

We, the GSA executive officers, express our frustration and concerns regarding the UCLA administration’s decision to keep the campus open and its lack of an effective emergency communications plan to ensure the safety of all graduate students. We urge the administration to develop a plan that will prevent the repetition of these events and put student health and safety above all else. We also urge the administration to close the campus should similar situations arise again to protect our students from unnecessary harm.

The executive officers of the GSA are happy and willing to assist the UCLA administration in improving its emergency communication system and its emergency management policies.

Sincerely,

**Michael Skiles**
Graduate Student Body President

**Parshon Khosravi**
Graduate Student Body VP of External Affairs

**Alexander Fung**
Graduate Student Body VP of Internal Affairs

**Rebecca Katz**
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