FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Remarks Delivered at September 20th, 2019 Graduate Student Orientation

September 20th, 2019 --- On September 20th, 2019, I, Zak Fisher, President of the UCLA Graduate Students Association, gave remarks before a crowd of incoming UCLA Graduate Students, I hereby make public my remarks spoken to those in attendance:

“Friends, Colleagues, Fellow Graduate Students:

It is my honor to stand before you today. Congratulations. Pursuing a UCLA Graduate Education is a tremendous accomplishment. You should be incredibly proud to be here today.

UCLA is one of the best universities human civilization has ever known. I need not go through the innumerable list of groundbreaking discoveries that have been accomplished on these very grounds. Suffice it to say that reciting a small sample of these accomplishments could take up all the time we have today. Those accomplishments are known the world over and make our institution a shining beacon for those dedicated to the good work of furthering human knowledge. The world's best scholars come to UCLA. The world's best academic work is done at UCLA. This is who we are: the world's very best research university.

Privately-owned media companies have made a habit of extolling UCLA's greatness with an omnipresent caveat: they insist that UCLA is not necessarily our nation’s best university, but instead UCLA is merely the best public university. Friends and colleagues, I am here today to tell you that UCLA is not only our nation’s best public university, but UCLA is in fact our nation's best university, and this is precisely because of the fact that we are a public university. Our shared devotion towards a common goal, a public goal, empowers us and enables us to become what we are. We know that everything we do here is of, by, and for that same great public spirit which has enabled the great state of California to become a worldwide economic superpower and an indispensable asset to the furtherance of the human spirit.

Everything we do in this public spirit rightly makes us stronger, and everything that we in opposition to this public spirit rightly makes us weaker. This is why, chief among the potential threats to the excellence of our outstanding University, there is no more potent threat than the threat of corruption of our public spirit. For, united in the public spirit, we will last as an
exemplar institution for all time. Our devotion to the public spirit is not a single factor in our ultimate success. It is the determinative element of our success.

It is with this awareness of the unique danger of corruption that your student government, the Graduate Students Association, fights to improve the material conditions of graduate students at UCLA. Each and every day, the GSA fights against corruption at our public school. We strive to implement policies that reflect the needs and the will of graduate students and the public. This is why our advocacy efforts this year focus around the theme of Stopping UCLA Oligarchy and Ending UCLA Homelessness.

In that spirit, we must acknowledge that it is morally wrong, and it is a long term strategic mistake, for our University’s leaders to prioritize the will of millionaire and billionaire donors while graduate students struggle to meet their basic needs. UCLA’s Executive Administrators make record-breaking salaries that place them amongst the top 1% of all American income earners. Meanwhile, UCLA’s own statistics show that most graduate students struggle to afford basic necessities like housing, healthcare, and food.

This year, GSA’s work consists of joining together and declaring loud and clear that it’s time we get our priorities straight. We are a world class research university with a $4 billion dollar budget. It is time we lower the rent in University Housing; it is time we expand graduate student access to affordable childcare; it is time to increase the resources we spend on mental health; and it is time for all graduate student workers to have the guaranteed workplace protections and dignity that a union contract affords. In sum, it is time for this public university to live up to its obligation to the public and ensure that every graduate student be able to truly thrive here, regardless of their background.

As I stand here today, I stand firm in the belief that there is a strong basis for optimism. When we come together and demand systemic change, anything is possible. All of us, as we are, here, today, already possess the cause, and will, and strength, and means to accomplish our goals and improve our lives. Joining together, we will get it done. If you would like to join in this fight, your student government stands ready to welcome you with open arms.

Congratulations again on beginning your graduate studies at UCLA. We are glad you are here. Thank you very much, and welcome.”