

Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology
Graduate Program
Department of Biology

February 1, 2011

Chancellor White
University of California Riverside

Dear Chancellor White:

Like all members of the UCR community, we understand spending at UCR must be reduced. However, we believe that changes to the budget which reduce the number of available graduate student Teaching Assistantship (TA) positions are inadvisable. We know spending on temporary teaching, which includes TA positions, has exceeded the budgeted amount in years past. Consequently, TAs can be cut or the funding for temporary teaching can be increased to reflect the demand for these positions. Therefore, we ask that you consider providing more funding so that the current level of TA positions available is not reduced.

In addition to supporting graduate students while they pursue their degrees, TA positions are important for our growth as educators and mentors. Not only do we receive training, but we are a large part of the “on the ground” deployment of education at UCR. Graduate students often have the most face-to-face time with students in biology courses. The Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology (EEOB) graduate program has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to creating a unique culture that emphasizes pedagogy among the graduate students and professors (e.g., a recent \$953,000 Department of Education GAANN grant - now expired, but awarded to EEOB faculty members to support EEOB graduate students – and a seminar offered to graduate students last quarter entitled “Philosophy and Pedagogy of Teaching Undergraduate Life Sciences”). Reducing the number of opportunities to hold TA positions not only diminishes the quality of education for undergraduates and hinders graduate student pedagogical training, but it also causes a drain on the research produced by the graduate students if they have to seek employment outside of the university. Moreover, it would reduce the number of laboratory and discussion sections that could be offered to undergraduates.

According to the UCR Mission Statement, this university is tasked with the stewardship of knowledge. We, as a university, must foster its discovery and dissemination. Moreover, the discovery of knowledge, through our research ventures, is tightly linked to the graduate student programs at this university. In order for us to complete sound research, publish our work, and graduate in a timely manner we need TAs. When we graduate in a

timely manner (i.e., equal to or less than the national average for each respective field), that reflects very highly on the department, the faculty, and the campus as a whole. A major focus of UCR's "2020" plan is to grow the graduate programs. In order to protect the future of UCR we must continue attracting, funding, and graduating M.S. and Ph.D. students. Comments from my colleagues make it clear that, the availability of funding via TA positions is a major criterion in the selection of a graduate program. Without these TA positions, it becomes much more difficult to recruit and retain top-flight students. Additionally, interacting with the undergraduate students in classroom lab and discussion sections allows us to engage undergraduate students in research endeavors. As of 2008, 95% of UCR students were currently participating in a research project, creative activity, or paper (UCUES Survey, 2008). Supporting graduate students with TAs indirectly supports undergraduate research. The effects of reducing the number of TA positions on our graduate program, on research in the Biology Department, and on the quality of our graduate students at this campus would be crippling.

We actively seek extramural funding to support ourselves and our research. In addition to having a Fulbright Scholar, about 10% of our students are supported by prestigious NSF Graduate Research Fellowships. Further, other EEOB students have been awarded Ford Foundation Fellowships, NSF and Australian Research Councils East-Asia Pacific Summer Institutes Fellowships, as well as numerous UC sponsored fellowships. Additionally, our professors have been successful in obtaining training grants (e.g., Department of Education GAANN) as well as research grants to fund students through GSRs. Despite this commitment to secure outside funding, EEOB graduate students – like students in many other departments – often must utilize TA positions as a source of funding to support ourselves while completing our dissertations.

We cannot stress enough the importance of TA positions to continue attracting quality graduate students, conducting world-class research, offering pedagogical training for future educators, and providing the undergraduates at UCR opportunities to be taught by the future leading scientists in Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology. We ask that you consider not reducing the CNAS temporary teaching budget so that the current level of TA positions may continue.

Sincerely,

Matthew Wolak, EEOB Graduate Student Association President
and The Students of the EEOB Graduate Program

Copy: Dean Baldwin, CNAS
Kimberly Hammond, EEOB Director