



May 14, 2021

Dear Chancellor Kim A. Wilcox and UCR Administration,

We want to express our appreciation for your support of our chapter of the Underground Scholars Initiative (USI) since its founding at UCR in 2018. Since its establishment, USI has collaborated with local and statewide organizations to support the experiences of currently and formerly incarcerated students in higher education. We have hosted the forgotten population of higher education and participated in weekly tabling events amongst other student organizations on our campus. We have been invited to present at UCR's Inspiring R'Leaders conference, the UCR Persist conference and the Annual California Council of Cultural Centers in Higher Education (CaCCHE) Conference. We have presented at two major national conferences: the 8th annual National Conference on Higher Education in St. Louis, Missouri and the 10th annual Beyond the Bars Conference at Columbia University in New York City. During our travels to St. Louis, Missouri and New York City we have built relationships with students, organizers, and leaders from across the county to increase our capacity to make an impact here in California.

In addition, we have participated in the Quest for Democracy which is an annual formerly incarcerated people's lobbying day and have contributed to various statewide policies such as Ban the box (AB 1008), Free the Vote (ACA 6), Use of Force (AB 392), Relative Placement (SB 354) and Criminal Record: Relief (SB 731). As a result of our activity, **\$118,500 in funding to support our student leadership and have earned critical recognition from the state legislature.**

The Underground Scholars are building the "prison-to-university pipeline" through recruitment, retention and advocacy for currently and formerly incarcerated students and their families. Originating at UC Berkeley in 2013, we now have chapters at UCLA, UCI, UCR, UCSB, UCSD, UCD, UCSC, and UC Merced. Our UCR chapter of the Underground Scholars represents the campus with the highest number of formerly incarcerated and system impacted students. Our growth to 91 members and hundreds of supporters is a significant accomplishment, especially since our chapter is among the most recently established (2018). This funding represents a major opportunity not just for USI members but for the UCR campus itself, highlighting our campus as a leader in growing national conversations in academia about the development of the prison - to - university pipeline. We will have the advantage of a student center with established administrative support, which will facilitate collaborations with other centers, and create an

important position in student governance.

However, on February 23, 2021 during the Diversity Council Meeting with Chancellor Wilcox, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Dr. Brian Haynes, and Associate Dean of students of the Ethnic and Gender centers, Shonté Thomas, we shared the urgency for an institutional home for the incoming \$118,500 funds. On March 2, 2021 we had a virtual meeting with Shonté Thomas to discuss the funding again and it's need for an institutional home. On April 8, 2021 we attempted to schedule a meeting with Shonté Thomas again but were ignored. On April 18, 2021 one of our advisors Dylan Rodriguez attempted to request a meeting but was also ignored. Finally, on May 12, 2021 we had a virtual meeting with Shonté Thomas to discuss USI's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) but received unacceptable news that the Student Affairs department could not accept/ support USI's \$118,500 student-led funding. This disappointing news has led us to urgently find a solution and UCR support.

We are in an urgent need to find an institutional home within UCR for the \$118,500, match our student-led accomplishments by doubling that amount to increase its support through supplemental resources, including a space on campus, which is crucial for community building, programming, and resource sharing.

We hope you were able to review the MOU, please let us know if you need anything else and when you can meet to discuss in further details the ways you can help us achieve our goal. Thank you for your time and continued support.

Sincerely,

The Underground Scholars Initiative, UC Riverside
Building the Prison to University Pipeline