2026 Senate-Administrative Implementation Workgroup on the Future of Graduate Education

Final Report, June 19, 2026

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1. Executive Summary

- **Key Finding:** Despite increased campus investment in graduate student support, the number of doctoral and MFA students at UC San Diego has declined over the past five years due to federal funding disruptions and UC-wide changes that have elevated costs. Next fall's entering class is projected to be 28% smaller, accelerating this trend. This decline has occurred even as undergraduate enrollments have risen sharply, making UC San Diego the UC campus with the highest undergraduate enrollment. To restore balance in our student populations, UC San Diego should consider a set of concrete actions to reverse the decline in doctoral and MFA enrollment, sustaining graduate education while also advancing our research and undergraduate teaching missions.

- **Core Challenges:** The total costs of employing graduate students as teaching or research assistants – including salaries, tuition, and fees such as health care – have risen sharply. While UC San Diego has substantially increased the funding for teaching assistants, this increase has not kept pace with rising costs and now supports fewer teaching assistant positions than five years ago. The costs of hiring a graduate student researcher have also risen beyond what extramural grants from major funding agencies allow Principal Investigators to pay, creating a gap between the agency-mandated caps and actual costs that can reduce opportunities for graduate students to be part of research teams. Beginning in 2025, federal support for scientific research through multiple funding agencies suddenly became far less available and predictable, reducing

extramural resources today and eroding Principal Investigators' confidence that they can fund five-year graduate degrees going forward.

- **Impacts.** The combined effect of these trends has been a reduction in the size of doctoral and MFA graduate programs at UC San Diego. In each year since 2021, total doctoral enrollments across the campus have declined. This trend will soon accelerate. The Fall 2026 entering cohort across all disciplines was projected to have 383 students, compared with recent cohorts that ranged from 531 students in 2025 to 635 in 2022. If not reversed, this sharp decline will challenge our institution's ability to provide research mentorship to graduate students, individualized instruction to undergraduates, and develop the next generation of scholars, artists, and researchers. It also threatens UC San Diego's research reputation, rankings, and long-term scholarly pipeline.

- **Proposed Response:** This report proposes six coordinated policy changes aimed at aligning costs with funding sources, solidifying salary support, increasing doctoral students' access to teaching assistant opportunities, and streamlining administrative processes.

2. Background & Current Landscape

Introduction

Academic Senate and administration leaders convened this workgroup in Winter 2026 quarter in order to move forward the recommendations of the Senate-Administration Workgroup on the Future of Graduate Education, which met throughout 2023 and issued a final report in January 2024. Much has changed since that time. The federal government's approach to funding academic research has shifted dramatically, making support much less reliable and leading to changes in the commitments that our campus can make to incoming doctoral and MFA students. The amount required to support a graduate student, either through employment as a research assistant or a teaching assistant, has continued to increase. The new contract that has just been agreed upon between UC leaders and the labor union representing graduate students brings further changes. Taken together, these shifts in the costs of supporting students with the uncertainty about federal funding have created a highly precarious moment in graduate education.

As a result, rather than attempting to address every part of the comprehensive set of proposals made in our predecessor workgroup's 2024 report, we chose instead a sharp focus on its most critical aspects. This approach allows us to highlight recent trends in graduate education that the committee found to be deeply concerning, leading us to make a small set of proposals designed to shift our recent trajectory to a more sustainable future. UC San Diego's enrollments in doctoral and MFA programs – the programs that our committee was charged to address – have declined across the campus over the past five years. The entering class will shrink far more sharply next fall, with some programs halting admissions altogether. Even though our

campus has increased investments in graduate education over this period – allocating an additional $26.9 million annually to graduate support – our programs continue to shrink. The reduction in graduate enrollments presents a challenge to meeting the research goals of our faculty, our plans to train and mentor the next generation of scholars and artists, and the educational needs of our fast-growing undergraduate population.

To address this challenge, our committee supports six proposals aimed at reversing the decline and building a future with more vibrant and productive graduate communities across all parts of our campus. This report begins by charting recent trends in graduate education at UC San Diego, setting them in the context of the wider UC system and juxtaposing the decline in graduate enrollments against the sharp increase in undergraduate enrollments. We then explore the reasons behind the decline, both for programs that typically rely on research assistant positions and those in which graduate students are supported as teaching assistants. Each has seen a decline in funded positions, for both common and distinct reasons, even while our campus has provided increased funding.

We then present and explain six proposals. Some of our recommendations come, unavoidably, with potential tradeoffs: prioritization of research funding during a time of constrained budgets, or prioritization of PhD and MFA students for teaching assistant positions over other master's students or non-student tutors. Other recommendations would require additional resources, either from new investments by state taxpayers or through a reprioritization of current campus funds. We do not seek to dismiss these concerns. However, we want to lay out the significant cause for concern if no actions are taken and show how these proposals would maximize the impact of state and campus investments while advancing many aspects of our university's core mission. A campuswide conversation about these trends and how to address them is vital for the future of graduate education at UC San Diego.

Historical and Institutional Context

It is the *quality* of graduate education – in the instruction provided in classrooms, laboratories, and artistic workshops, in the mentorship that helps students grow into scholars, and in the training provided to ensure that their teaching and research experiences are successful – that should be our institution's primary focus. The pure *quantity* of graduate students should not be an end in and of itself.

But in many concrete ways, a reduction in the size of graduate cohorts driven by financial constraints directly affects the quality of the student experience that we can offer. When a graduate program that has traditionally been larger can only enroll 4-5 new students in a cohort, which is now happening in many longstanding and excellent departments, it becomes impossible to offer a range of graduate courses, especially in specialized methods or subjects. If an MFA program in the performing arts cannot admit enough students to fill the many roles of an artistic performance, it loses part of its core identity. Natural science and engineering labs shrink, disrupting the cohort-to-cohort relationships that buttress their research programs and

threaten their future productivity. The ratio of undergraduate students to teaching assistants rises, making it harder for graduate students to sharpen their pedagogical skills as they struggle to keep up with an overwhelming amount of grading. Graduate programs with stellar international reputations continue to receive hundreds of applicants, but can only admit a tiny proportion, shutting doors to many well-qualified students who would love to join our departments.

All of this can compromise the excellence of UC San Diego as an institution. Indeed, one of the key metrics in the venerable, objective rankings of the "Top American Research Universities" is the number of doctorates awarded each year. In the metrics that drove those rankings in 2002, UC San Diego awarded 285 doctorates. In the data gathered for the rankings in 2020, the number of doctorates awarded across our institution had increased to 528. The leveling and now decline in program sizes since then jeopardizes our opportunity to rise further in external reputation and to broaden the pipeline of scholars produced by our programs.

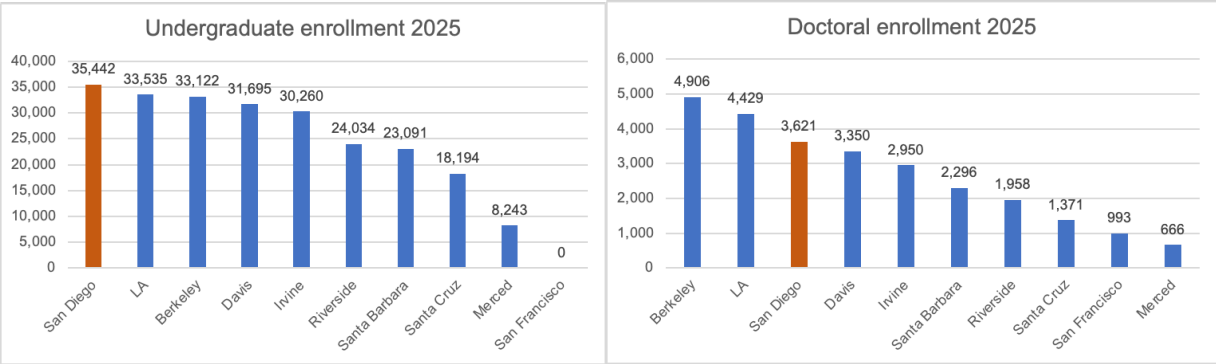
[Source: Annual Reports of "The Top American Research Universities," produced by The Center for Measuring University Performance, https://mupcenter.org/.]

2.1 Graduate Enrollment Trends

This section draws upon official sources to provide a few key data points that informed our committee's deliberations and which we think are vital to the campuswide conversation. We provide data, sources, and a brief narrative.

UC San Diego Has More Undergraduates, Fewer PhDs than Peer Ucs

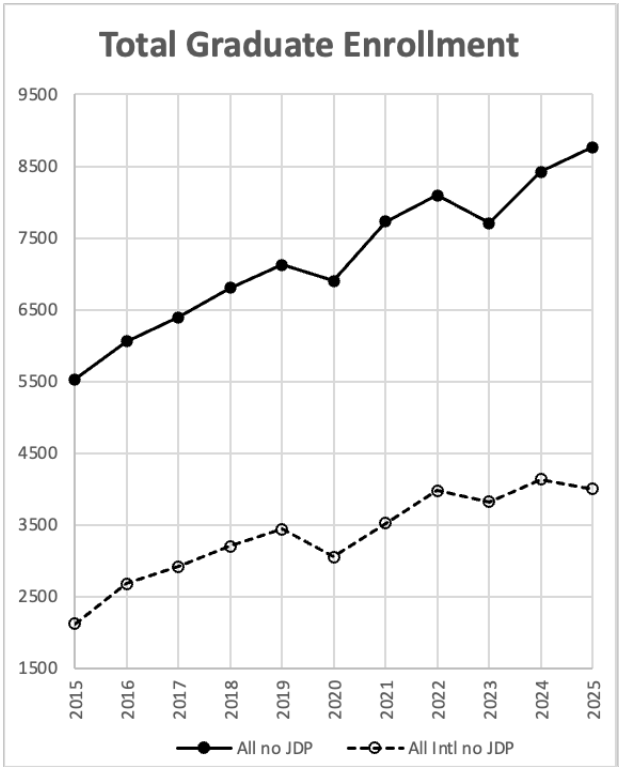
UC San Diego now enrolls more undergraduates than any UC campus, but far fewer doctoral students than UC Berkeley and UCLA. In the fall of 2025, our ratio of undergraduates to doctoral students stood at 9.8 to 1, compared with 6.8 to 1 at UC Berkeley and 7.6 to 1 at UCLA. This is true even though expenditures from federal research grants were the largest of any UC campus in 2022 (the most recent year for which these data are available).

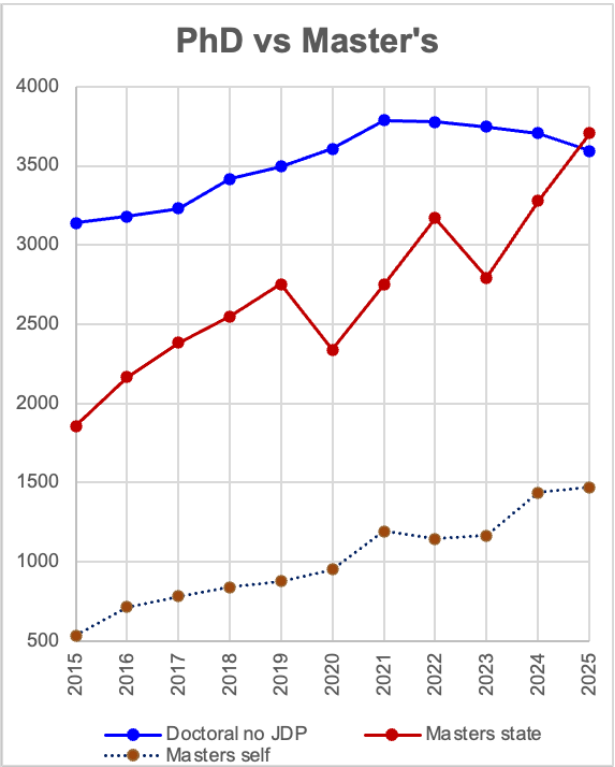


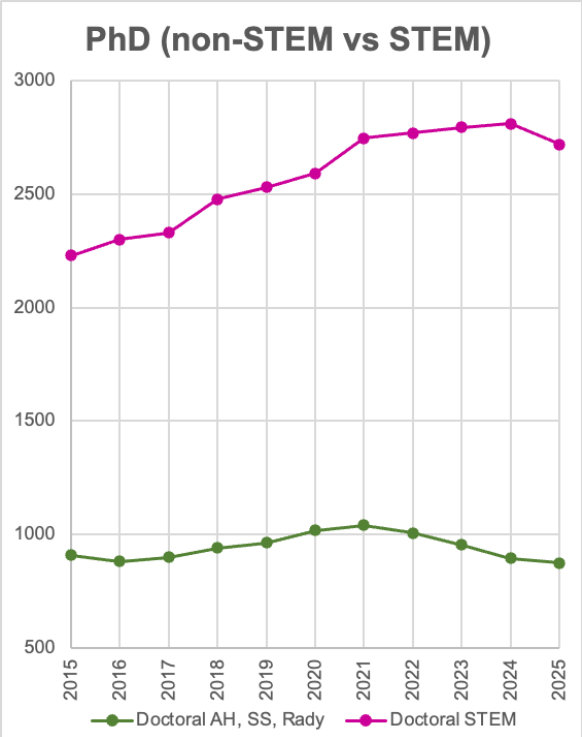
[Source: Fall Enrollment at a Glance, 2025, https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/fall-enrollment-glance]

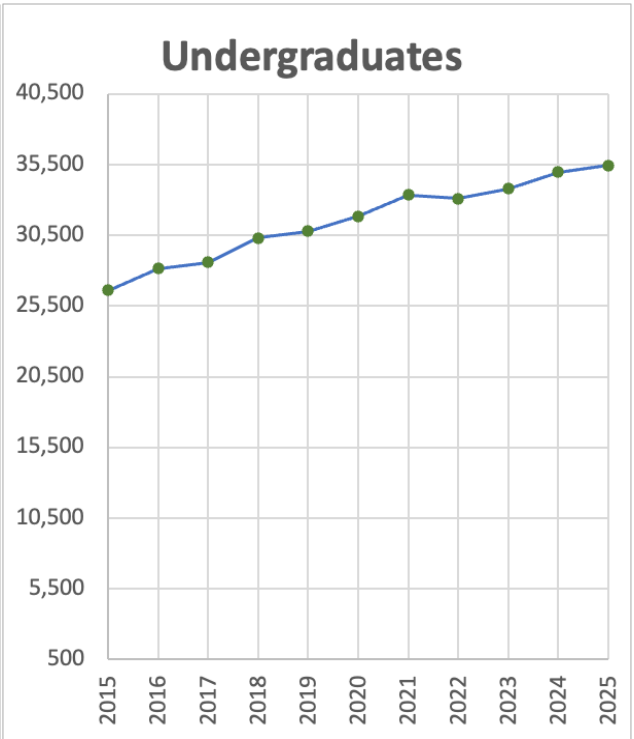
While Master's Enrollment has Risen, PhD Enrollments Have Fallen

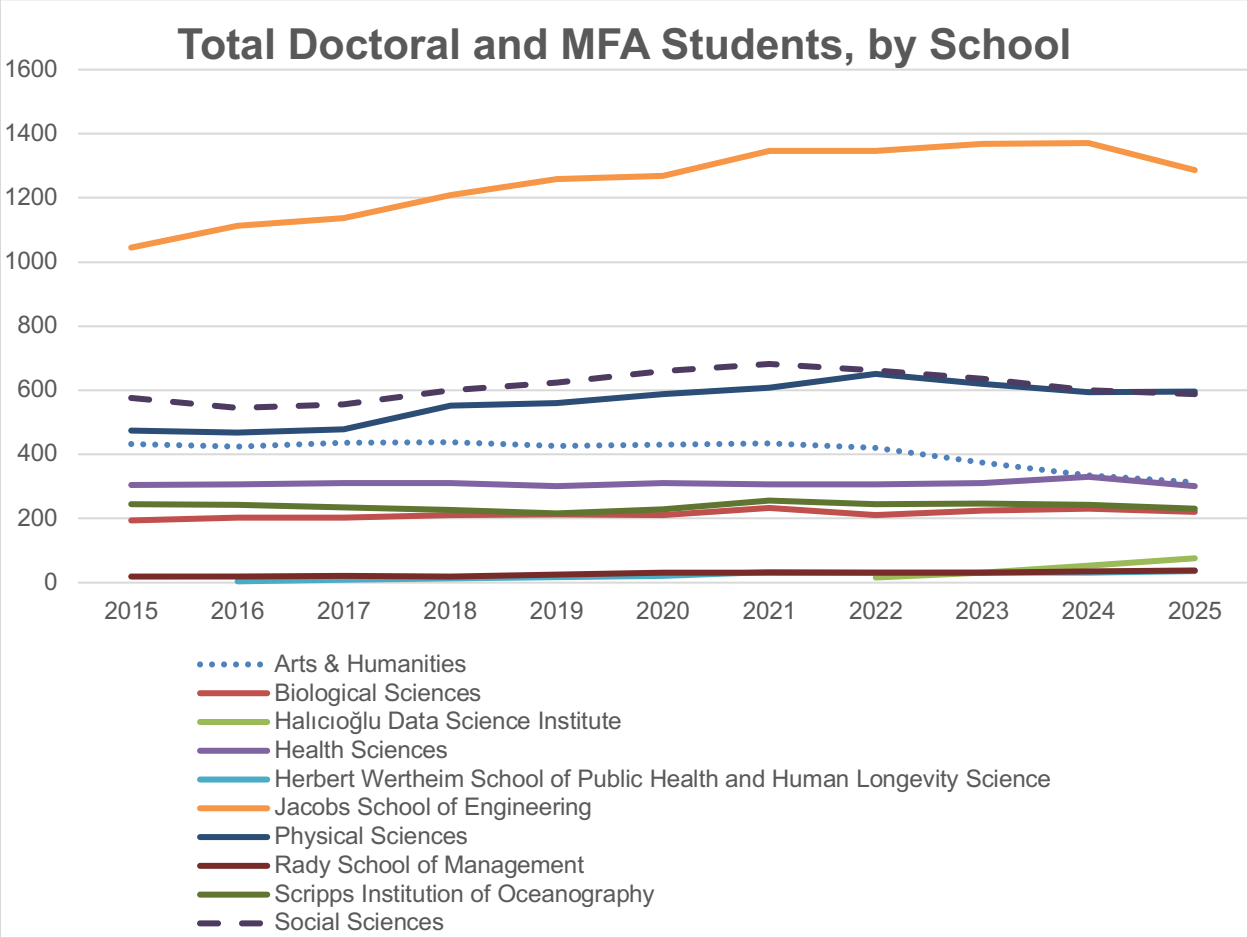
Over the past decade, enrollment in self-supporting and state-supported master's programs at UC San Diego has risen. This master's growth advances key parts of our university's mission, allowing more students to advance in their professions, better meeting state and national workforce needs, and often launching research careers. At the same time, however, doctoral enrollment has not kept pace, peaking at 3,787 in 2021 and declining to 3,594 since then. Enrollment trends have varied across disciplines. The total number of doctoral students in STEM fields has risen from 2,229 students in 2015 to 2,809 in 2025, with especially strong growth coming in the Jacobs School of Engineering, in the Physical Sciences, and in the new Schools of Data Science (Halıcıoğlu) and Public Health (Wertheim). In the non-STEM fields, enrollment has been essentially stable for the full decade, registering 909 students in 2015 and 875 in 2025. In Arts and Humanities, the combined number of doctoral and MFA students fell from 432 in 2015 to 313 in 2025. By contrast, over this decade, total undergraduate enrollments have risen from 26,590 to 35,442.






PhD (non-STEM vs STEM)
3000
2500
2000
1500
1000
500
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
Doctoral AH, SS, Rady
Doctoral STEM


Undergraduates
40,500
35,500
30,500
25,500
20,500
15,500
10,500
5,500
500
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025


Total Doctoral and MFA Students, by School
1600
1400
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
Arts & Humanities
Biological Sciences
Halıcıoğlu Data Science Institute
Health Sciences
Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science
Jacobs School of Engineering
Physical Sciences
Rady School of Management
Scripps Institution of Oceanography
Social Sciences

[Data from 2015-2024 taken from https://grad.ucsd.edu/about/grad-data/enrollment.html]

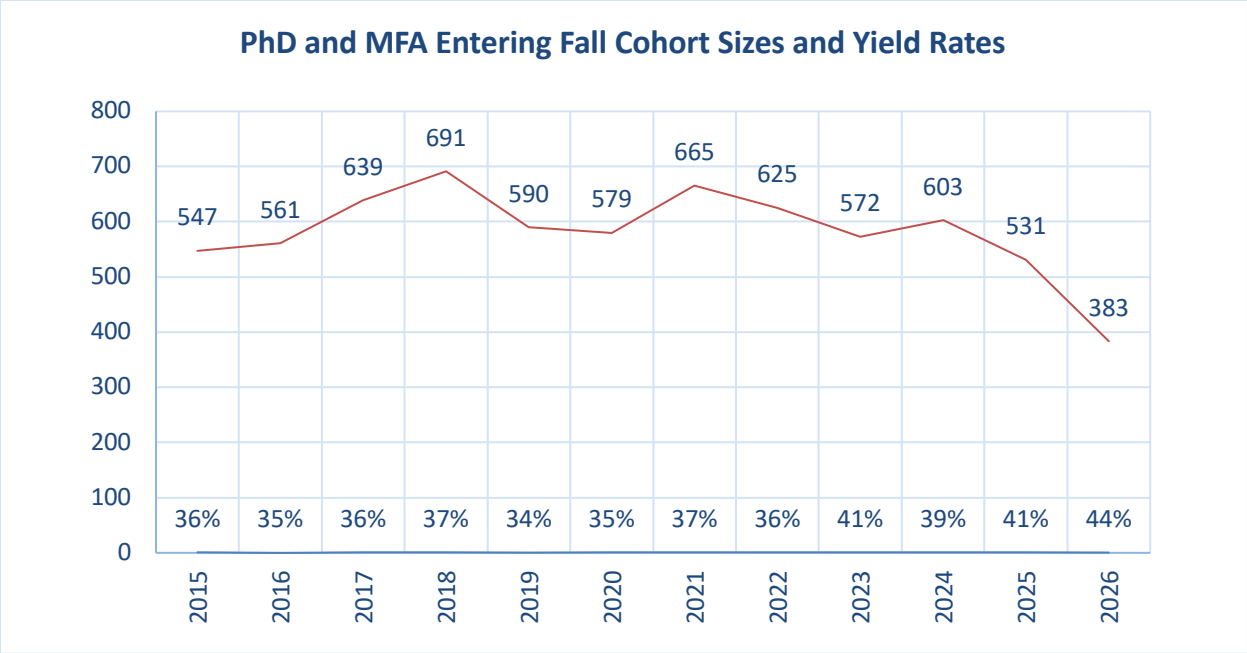
[Data from 2025 taken from https://tableau.ucsd.edu/#/views/GraduateStudentEnrollment/OverallEnrollment?:iid=2]

[Data for Undergraduates from https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/fall-enrollment-glance]

The Fall, 2026 Doctoral and MFA Entering Cohort will Drop by 28%, a Path to Further Decline in Program Sizes

Each fall's entering cohort of doctoral and MFA students brings fresh intellectual energy to programs and sets them on a trajectory toward future total enrollments. After declining from 635 in the fall of 2022 to 531 in the fall of 2025 as programs sought to adapt to new graduate labor contracts, the entering cohort declined dramatically to 383 students accepting admission for the fall of 2026 (as of June 2026). This was not a result of UC San Diego becoming less attractive to admitted students. Yield rates averaged 43.8% for Fall, 2026 admitted students, compared with a yield of 41.2% for Fall 2025 admits, with yields holding strong for both domestic and international students. The decline occurred because the total number of offers of admission declined from 1,299 in 2025 to 874 for 2026.

That shift was not driven by any single policy decision; the number of admissions offers is determined by programs, in collaboration with school deans and in consultation with GEPA. Programs, faced with the dual challenges of rising costs per admitted student along with the decline and unpredictability of federal research funding, responded by admitting fewer students. The Mathematics, Music, Sociology, and Education Studies doctoral programs as well as the Acting and Dance MFAs programs all paused admissions for the Fall of 2026 cohort. Program-by-program, these were prudent decisions made to ensure that they could plan to support every student who joined their entering cohort. The sum total of their impact has been a dramatic decline in the size of the overall cohort of doctoral and MFA students.

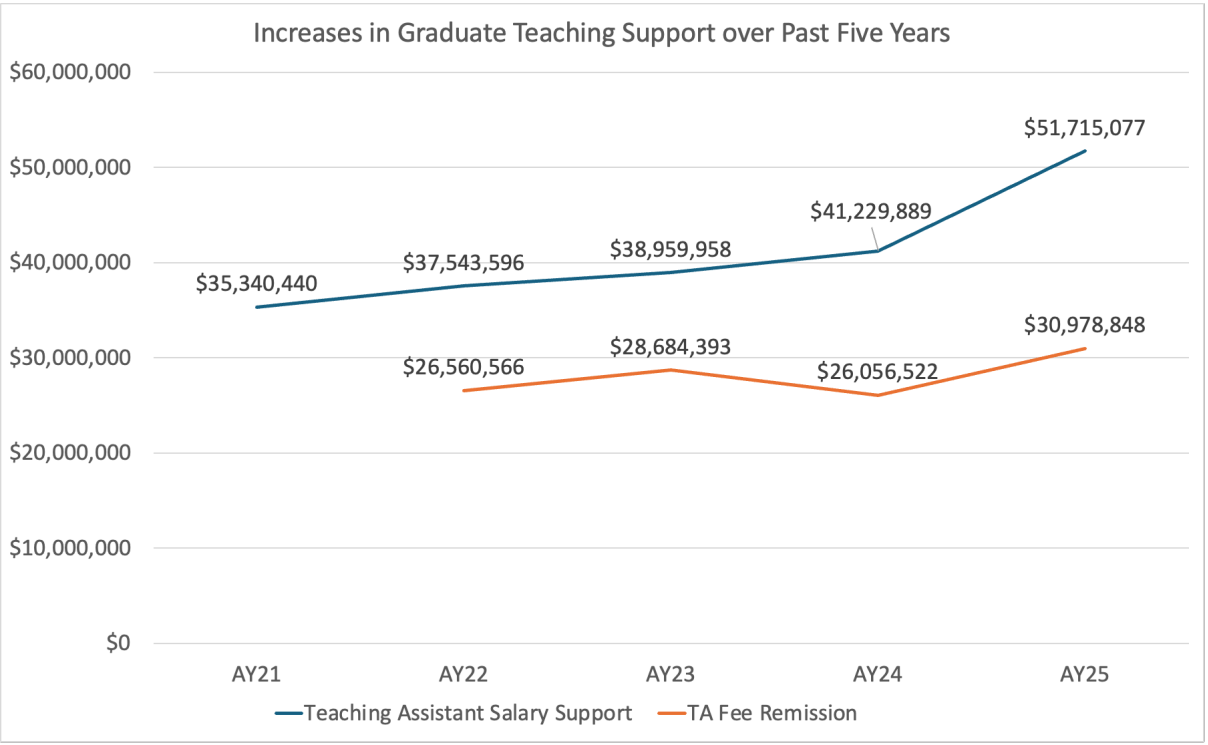


[Source: GEPA compilation of departmental data]

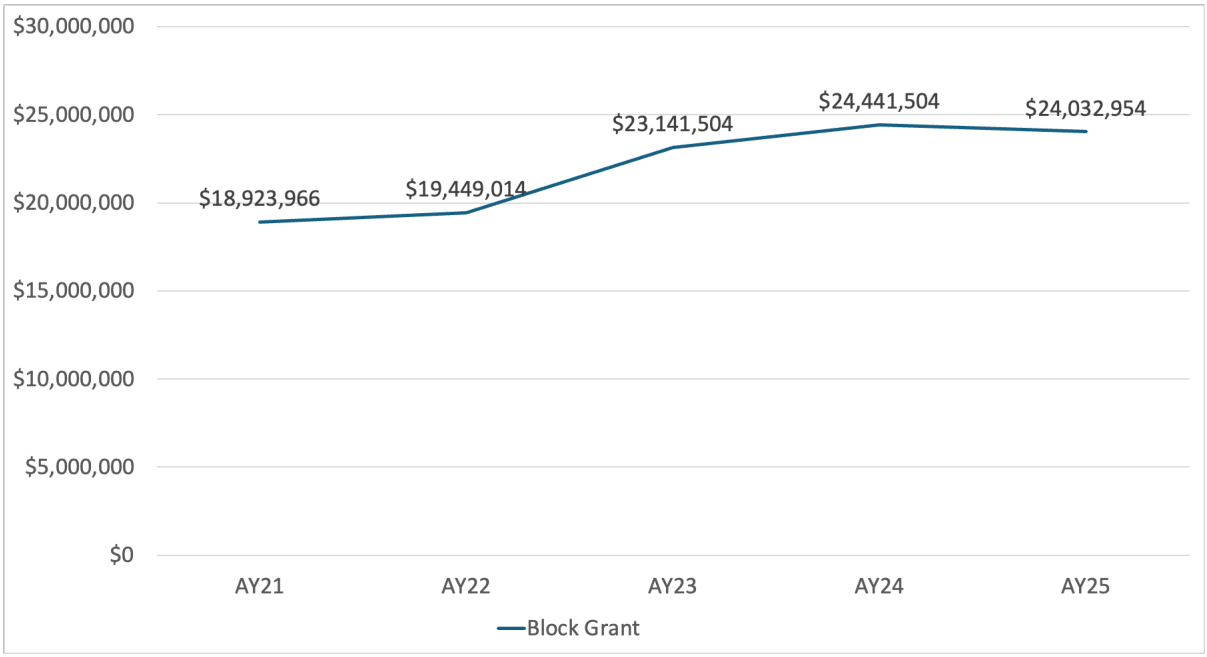
2.2 Salary and Funding Context

UC San Diego Made Large Investments in Graduate Teaching Support over the Past Five Years

Has the decline in current and future graduate enrollments been the result of a disinvestment from graduate education over the past five years? On the contrary, during exactly the period in which enrollments have dropped, university investment has risen. Alongside the extramural funds that support the salaries, tuition, and fees of many graduate student researchers, UC San Diego provides significant support for graduate student instructor positions, student fellowships, and research positions through three fundings streams, each of which has risen since 2021. Funding for teaching assistant salary support rose from $35.3 million in 2021 to $51.7 million in 2025. Support for the tuition and fees of teaching assistants grew from $26.6 million in 2022 to $31.0 million in 2026. The “Block Grant,” a flexible source that helps programs meet a broad set of graduate student needs, grew from $18.9 million in 2021 to $24.0 in 2025. Combined, UC San Diego’s annual investment in graduate education through these three sources rose by $26.9 million over the past five years, a 32% increase.

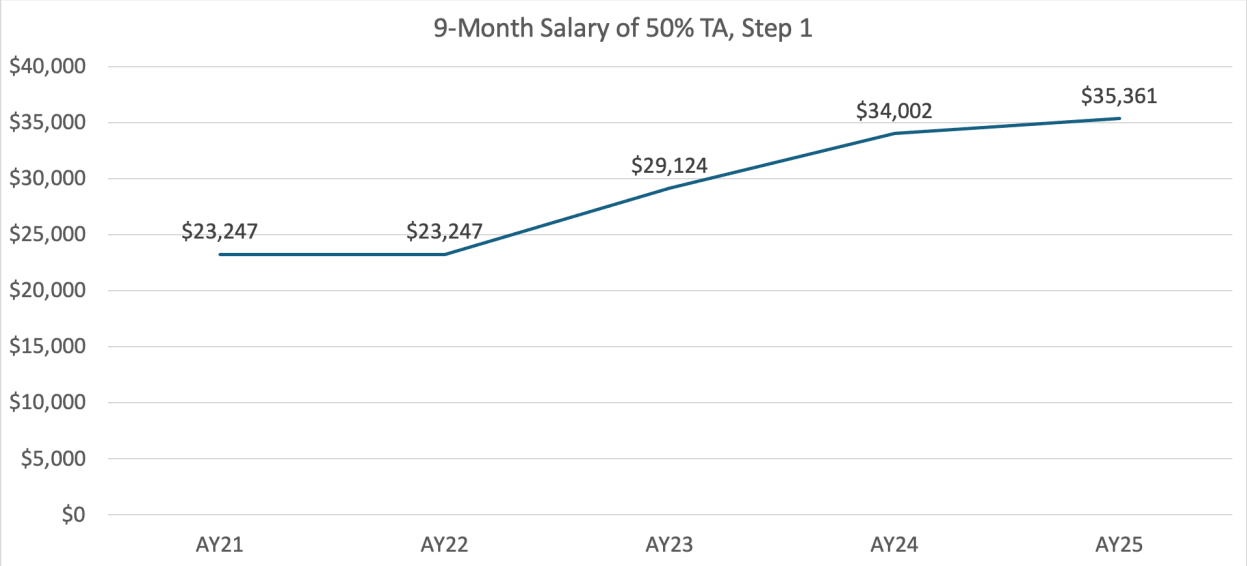


UC San Diego Also Increased the Graduate Block Grant over Past Five Years

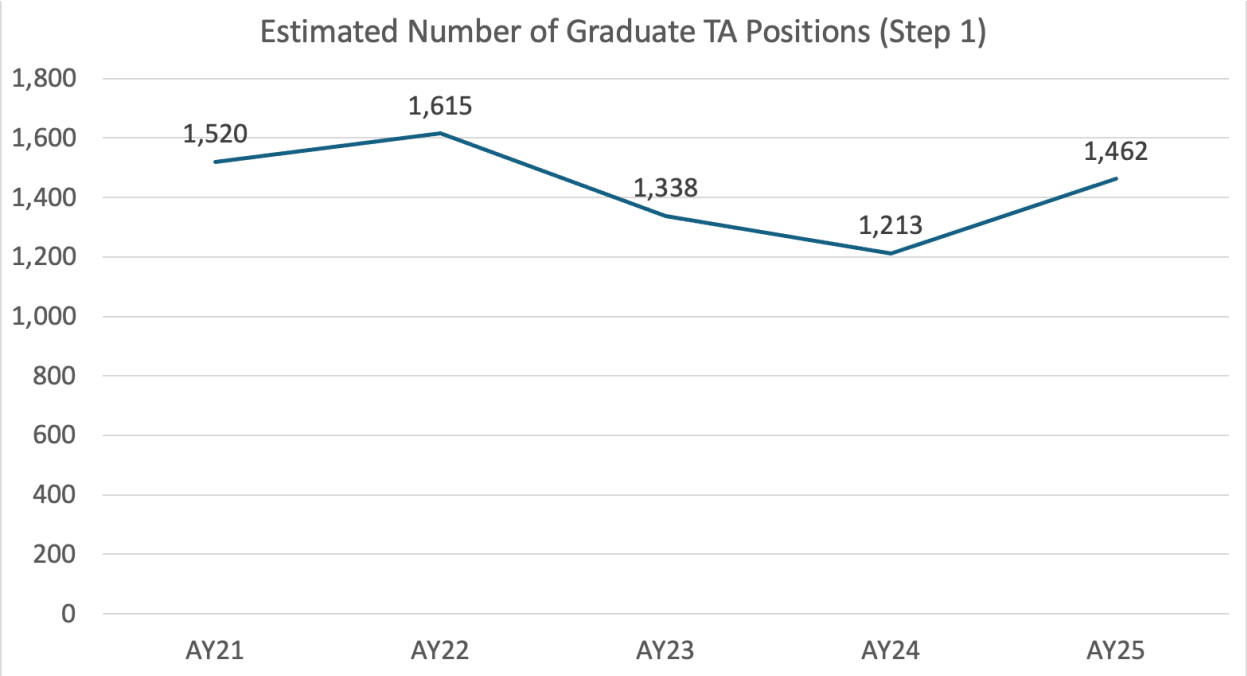


Over this same period, graduate student salaries have also increased, both in teaching and in research positions. The 9-month salary for a graduate teaching assistant, Step 1, rose from just over $23,000 in 2021 to just over $35,000 in 2025. As a result, the calculated number of graduate teaching positions generated by the teaching assistant funding formula declined from 1,520 to 1,462 positions per year over the same period, even while university investments in this area have grown sharply. The salaries of graduate student researchers have grown by 31% over this period. Each of these changes has been vital to ensuring that graduate student employees can meet the rising full cost of attendance at UC San Diego. At the same time, even with more funding allocated to research and teaching by the university, fewer employment positions – and thus opportunities for students to earn the tuition and fees support that is essential to pursuing their education – are available today.

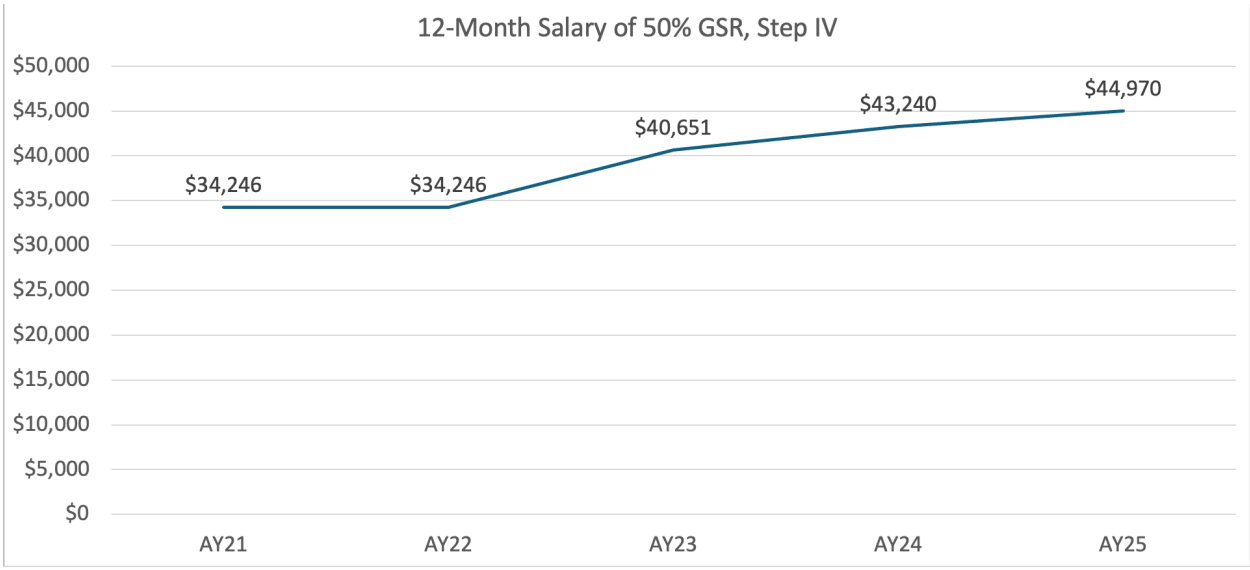
But Graduate Teaching Salaries Have Also Risen Sharply During this Time



As a Result, Even with Increasing Campus Investments, Fewer Graduate TA Positions are Now Funded



Salaries of Graduate Student Researchers Have Also Risen in Recent Years



Sources: Pay rates come from https://grad.ucsd.edu/financial/employment/student-pay-rates.html#2020-2023. Note that for GSRs, the 2021 and 2022 equivalent of a Step IV was a Step 7, as the scale moved from a 10-step scale to a 6-step scale in 2023.

3. Funding Gap for GSRs Supported by Key Funding Agencies

In many disciplines, the total cost of hiring a graduate student researcher far exceeds the amount that a federal funding agency will allow for this purpose. For instance, the cost of hiring a Step VI GSR at 50% effort over 12 months – a common appointment in natural science and engineering programs – was $77,438 for salary, tuition, and fees last academic year. But an NIH R01 grant – a common funding type from this key agency – capped the amount that could spent for this purpose at $62,232. That left a “cap-gap” of over $15,000 per year for the Principal Investigator to meet, an amount that thus totals over $75,000 to employ a graduate student during their full five-year course of study. The table below lists the cap gaps for hiring graduate student researchers based on different grant types, showing that in some cases the gap can be as much as $200,000 over a student’s five-year course of study. (Note that these figures reflect the best information available to our Workgroup in early 2026, that many salary levels adjust over time, and that tuition and fee rates can vary across time and units as well.)

Principal Investigators today must find some way to meet this gap in order to fund a graduate student. For NIH T-32 grants, beginning in the 2024-25 Academic Year, the Chancellor funded a program to meet the cap gap. This is an example of a tremendously impactful program that helps leverage extramural funds. Yet when faculty receive the other types of grants listed in our table, they are not able to access these funds. How do they meet the gap, allowing them to hire, mentor, and collaborate with graduate student researchers?

A common approach is for faculty to forgo their own salary on grants, exchanging it to generate flexible funds to cover cap gap for students. The mechanism through which they do so is the Faculty Salary Exchange Program (FSEP). Yet a clear obstacle is that Schools charge salary and benefits to grants before returning a discretionary amount in FSEP funds, effectively costing faculty 25-35% of these funds if they wish to use them to cover the cap gap. Schools might consider a full return of FSEP funds if they are used to support GSR salaries, tuition, and fees. Another way that PIs seek to meet the cap gap is “rebudgeting” within a single grant, and we encourage campus leaders to further their efforts to work with the NIH to clarify ways in which PIs may be allowed to do so.

Because of the current cap gaps for hiring graduate students as researchers on many common extramural grants, faculty often find it more attractive to hire postdoctoral scholars. PIs do not face a cap gap in doing so, as agencies allow grants to cover the full cost of postdoctoral salaries and benefits currently. These scholars are also hired at 100% effort rather than 50% effort and have already acquired specialized research skills. Postdoctoral scholars are a vital part of UC San Diego’s intellectual community and contribute greatly to research projects. However, if current incentives cause a future shift away from hiring graduate student researchers and toward only postdocs, the pipeline of scholars will be disrupted and our university’s key role in graduate training and mentorship will be eroded.

Funding Gaps for Key Agencies

2025-26	AHA Predoctoral Fellowship	NIH T15/T32 or F30/F31	ACS Research Grant	NSF GRFP	NIH R01 etc.
UCSD Salary (Step 6)	$52,211.52	$52,211.52	$52,211.52	$52,211.52	$52,211.52
UCSD Tuition & Fees	$21,373.44	$21,373.44	GSRTF	$21,373.44	GSRTF
UCSD Benefits (Includes GSRTF)	Trainee	Trainee	$25,227.23	Trainee	$25,227.23
Agency Stipend or Salary Cap	$28,788.00	$28,788.00	$52,211.52	$37,000.00	$62,232.00
Agency Tuition & Fee Cap (Including Health Insurance)	$4,550.00	$14,082.06	$0.00	$16,000.00	$0.00
Agency Benefits (Includes Remission)	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00	$0.00
Total Compensation Gap (1 Year)	-$40,246.96	-$30,714.90	-$25,227.23	-$20,584.96	-$15,206.75
Total Compensation (5 Years)	$367,924.80	$367,924.80	$387,193.75	$367,924.80	$387,193.75
Total Gap (5 Years)	-$201,234.80	-$153,574.48	-$126,136.15	-$102,924.80	-$76,033.75

4. Strategic Risks of the Decline in PhD/MFA Cohorts

1. **Signals Retrenchment Rather Than Leadership.** At a moment when some peer institutions are expanding doctoral training, contraction risks reputational damage that may be difficult to reverse.
2. **Erodes Institutional Reputation.** Doctoral education is a core marker of research university stature. A visible contraction in PhD training risks our excellence in research, scholarship, and creative activities, negatively impacting our national rankings and peer perception.
3. **Weakens the Long-Term Leadership Pipeline.** PhD and MFA programs produce future faculty, industry innovators, performers, policymakers, artists and field-defining scholars. Reducing cohorts diminishes UC San Diego's role in shaping disciplinary leadership for decades.

4. **Diminishes Educational Identity and Mission.** A research university is defined not only by discovery, but by training the next generation of scholars. A shift toward predominantly postdoctoral labor reframes the institution from educator to research contractor.

5. **Poses Challenges to Undergraduate Education.** Our current 70:1 undergraduate student-to-TA ratio provided by the teaching assistant funding formula makes it difficult to deliver education that focuses on critical thinking, writing, performance, laboratory skills, or verbal expression. Any further shrinking of the graduate student population while increasing undergraduate enrollment will pose stark challenges to the quality of the educational experience.

6. **Losing critical mass**. MFA programs require enrollment thresholds to justify studio courses, exhibitions, performances, and visiting artist ecosystems. Programs in other disciplines may be able to offer core courses to smaller incoming courses but will lose the ability to teach elective graduate classes that put our students at the cutting edge of their fields.

7. **Narrows Career and Network Multipliers.** PhD and MFA graduates build durable, cross-sector networks that amplify the university's visibility and impact. Postdocs, by contrast, are less institutionally anchored.

8. **Undermines the "Decade of the Alumni" Effect.** PhD and MFA alumni drive institutional pride, philanthropic engagement, and global professional networks. Curtailing PhD production reduces the long-tail return on alumni influence and giving.

5. Six Policy Proposals

Proposal 1. Align GSR Costs with Extramural Funding Levels

- **Goal:** Principal Investigators and departments should not pay more for a GSR than the external sponsor will fund.

- **Connection to Key Recommendations from the 2024 SAWG Report**: One of the graduate research recommendations in that report read: "We urge consideration of models where a larger portion of the tuition & fees for graduate research positions is returned to departments/individual investigators when the total cost of graduate support exceeds that allowed by extramural grants or, for disciplines where extramural funding is scarce, exceeds departmental resources."

- **Actions:**

    - Extend the Chancellor's "Cap Gap" model beyond dedicated training grants. The program, which focuses on meeting the cap gap for extramural training

grants, provided $2.1 million in support for 20 training grants in the 2025 Academic Year, effectively leveraging extramural funding by providing partial support for 173 doctoral students. This successful model could be expanded to cover grants from all agencies that limit graduate support to a level that is below the costs of hiring a GSR at UC San Diego.

- UC San Diego leadership could consider participating in unified system-wide efforts to persuade government funding agencies to change the salary caps in a manner that allows grants to fully fund GSR positions.

- Provide transparent, campus-wide guidelines for sponsor-cap calculations.

Proposal 2. Fully Fund Negotiated Salary Increases Centrally

- **Goal:** When centrally-negotiated agreements mandate salary increases for graduate teaching and research assistants, central state or university resources should pay for these increases.

- **Rationale:** Currently, our campus, its graduate programs, and individual PIs must absorb the salary costs that arise from system-wide labor agreements. Absorption of these costs leads to departmental deficits, making it difficult to sustain healthy cohort sizes, reducing teaching and research opportunities, decreasing graduate fellowship or travel allocations, or even pausing admissions. Each of these cuts diminishes opportunities for current or future students, bringing negative consequences for individual students, graduate programs, and the university as a whole.

- **Connection to Key Recommendations from the 2024 SAWG Report**: One of the graduate research recommendations in that report read: “Campus and UC leadership should push for increased graduate student support. As part of those efforts, they should emphasize to government officials [2] and donors that the creativity and energy of graduate students underlies many of our research advances.” One of the graduate teaching recommendations read: “It is imperative that the Administration and Academic Senate continue working together to fully fund the TA Load Factors that were determined by a comprehensive, curriculum-based review of coursework.”

- **Implementation:** While each contract negotiation is unique to the time and circumstances that surround it, with each new contract an expiration date is clearly defined and agreed on by both parties. Salary and benefits are two areas of the contract that are most often addressed within these negotiation sessions. It is imperative that leading up to contract expiration the UC system, in communication with state leaders and in collaboration with each campus, prepare for these talks through an internal budgetary review to prepare to reallocate funds to departments to best support them and maintain graduate programs at their current levels. If the state or central campus budget

office cannot fully fund a labor contract to which they agree, they could pursue a phased approach that centrally supports new contracts while asking departments to determine their budgetary needs for maintaining their graduate programs while transitioning away from full centralized funding of the salary increment over the long term.

Proposal 3. Prioritize PhD & MFA Students for TA Appointments

- **Goal:** Ensure doctoral and MFA students receive first consideration for TA roles.

- **Rationale:** With fewer teaching positions available across the university today, we strongly support the 2024 Senate Administration Workgroup in advancing the principle that the first priority for teaching positions should be PhD and MFA students, rather than master's students or non-student tutors. We recognize that, in limited circumstances, hiring from outside of doctoral and MFA programs may be justified by unique curricular needs or well-articulated programmatic goals. But it should not be the default, at a time when doctoral and MFA programs are cutting their cohorts due to the scarcity of teaching positions.

- **Connection to Key Recommendations from the 2024 SAWG Report**: One of the graduate teaching recommendations in that report read: "Currently, nearly 30% of the funded graduate teaching positions at our university go to master's students, including those in professional and self-supporting programs, paying their full tuition, fees, and salaries. We recommend prioritizing PhD and MFA students, who have the expertise and experience to support undergraduate teaching, for these positions with reciprocal agreements between cognate departments to facilitate this." Updating this with the most recent data available, our 2026 committee found that in AY 2024-25, 21 % of TA hires were from state-supported and self-supporting master's programs. This represented 236 TA positions per quarter, at a cost of approximately $13.4 M annually.

- **Implementation:**

    - Academic Affairs and Senate leaders, if they support this approach, should be clear and consistent in the message that all Schools and College Writing Programs should make strong efforts to prioritize doctoral and MFA students for teaching assistant positions. They could lead conversations with programs that hire a large percentage of master's students or non-student tutors to learn about the goals and constraints that have driven this approach and what might be done to overcome those obstacles. Another approach would be to place a university-wide or program-specific target for the percentage of master's students or non-student tutors who may be hired for teaching positions.

    - This may involve one department hiring from another in a cognate discipline, or College Writing Programs hiring from students in schools such as Arts and Humanities or Social Sciences. One approach to facilitate this in a way that meets the needs of both units would be an expansion of the new agreements

that better integrate doctoral and MFA students into writing program hiring. (Both the School of Arts and Humanities and the School of Social Sciences have created initial MOUs with the writing programs to do so.) Another approach would be that the writing programs guarantee a percentage of TA slots for current graduate students, indexed to the number of departmental faculty teaching in the programs. The departments would guarantee to furnish the full complement of graduate student TAs, providing continuity and predictability for the writing programs and the departments.

- Since the 2024 SAWG report, an important step that GEPA partnered with programs on has been the TA Marketplace, which advertises positions across all discipline. To fully leverage the information available in this Marketplace, School leadership teams might take inventory of TA or Reader requirements within a department and identify PhD or MFA programs from similar or adjacent departments/programs that could fill those roles and consider creating hiring agreements between those programs.

Proposal 4. Restore Multi-Year Budget Flexibility

- **Goal:** Return to the prior university practice of allowing programs to carry modest deficits or surpluses across a 2-year window (or longer), enabling them to plan doctoral and MFA cohort sizes with greater stability and confidence.

- **Rationale:** Over the past several years, departments have faced increasingly volatile year-to-year budget conditions driven by rising graduate student employment costs, unpredictable external funding, and shifting campus allocations. Because current policy requires annual budget balancing, even small short-term fluctuations can force programs to pause or sharply reduce doctoral admissions. This has already resulted in abrupt pauses in doctoral admissions and threatens long-term cohort continuity.

- **Benefit:** This flexible approach – a past practice that served the university well during the ups and downs of the state budget – allows smoothed spending that stabilizes cohort pipelines, preserves curricular viability and research group continuity, and avoids abrupt pauses in doctoral admissions. It better aligns with graduate education timelines to reflect the reality of 5–7 years of doctoral education rather than forcing annual volatility, enhances competitiveness and enables UC San Diego to recruit top candidates and maintain its national research standing due to stable admissions, and reduces administrative burden to spend significant time recalculating admissions targets each year.

- **Connection to Key Recommendations from the 2024 SAWG Report**: The first financial recommendation of that report was “Financial models should be simple and transparent, providing departments with autonomy in making financial decisions.”

Proposal 5. Restore Department Option to Make 5-Year Funding Commitments

- **Goal:** Departments may provide five-year commitments where financially feasible, rather than a mandatory one-year pledge. In cases where departments do not choose to make this commitment, ensure that language in the campus-wide uniform offer letters transmits confidence that a student in good standing will be supported through completion of their degree, contingent on funding being available, clearly signaling UC San Diego's dedication to graduate support as strongly as possible.

- **Rationale:** Provides flexibility and enhances recruitment: Recognizes discipline-specific funding models and degree-time-to-completion variations.

- **Connection to Key Recommendations from the 2024 SAWG Report**: The first overall recommendation from that report was: "UC San Diego maintain its commitment to predictable and durable multi-year funding for all PhD students (for five years) and MFA students (for three years)"

Proposal 6. Remove Bureaucratic Obstacles to Graduate Success

Sub-initiative	Current Issue	Proposed Remedy
Identity Management	Multiple emails/logins cause confusion and errors.	Deploy a unified graduate-student identity across academic and administrative enterprise systems.
Centralize Labor & HR Functions	Departmental time-keeping enforcement strains mentor-student relations.	Shift time-keeping oversight and disciplinary actions to a central campus office.
Modernize Graduate Student Portal ("Student-DB")	UI/UX challenges hinder self-service for graduate students, spring annual evaluation requirements for faculty, and administrative functions for staff.	Replace graduate **and** staff portals, forms and workflow with a modern system, based on user-testing and feedback.
Fellowship & Grant Review	Post-award compliance reviews delay funds and demoralize students.	OCGA to pre-review fellowship terms for compliance before submission/acceptance.

Senate-Administrative Workgroup Membership

Graduate Student Representative

- Caleb Mertz-Vega, Vice-President, GPSA

Academic Senate Members

- Stephanie Fraley, Bioengineering (Co-Chair)
- Jiun-Shyan Chen, Structural Engineering
- Mariana Cherner, Psychiatry
- Jennifer Mackinnon, SIO
- Michael Provence, History

Administration Members

- Thad Kousser, GEPA (Co-Chair)
- Cristina Della Coletta, Dean of Arts and Humanities
- Arshad Desai, Cell and Development Biology
- Tiffany Swiderki, Academic Affairs
- Erik Yorkston, Rady School
- Oleg Shpryko, Physics

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August 8, 2024

ELIZABETH H. SIMMONS
Executive Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs

JUDY KIM
Interim Dean, Division of Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs

THAD KOUSSER
Professor, Political Science and SAWG Co-Chair

SUBJECT: Senate-Administration Workgroup Report on the Future of Graduate Education

Dear EVC Simmons, Interim Dean Kim, and Professor Kousser,

The Senate-Administration Workgroup Report on the Future of Graduate Education was distributed to Senate standing committees and discussed at the April 8, and June 20, 2024, Senate Council meetings. Reviewers lauded the Workgroup for the care, work, and time invested to put together a comprehensive and thoughtful report identifying key issues and making recommendations to confront many of the challenges in graduate education at UC San Diego. The landscape continues to quickly evolve in response to the UAW bargaining agreements and budget changes. Council offered the following comments.

Reviewers are broadly supportive of the recommendations related to graduate research, teaching, and finances, and agree with the workgroup's recommendation to create a Senate-Administration Implementation Group. It will be necessary to craft more detailed recommendations on how to move forward with implementation and incorporate the decisions that come out of campus review of the Academic Support Model Task Force Report. Going forward, it is important that: 1. Concrete action plans are developed, including designating the parties responsible for taking action and what types of resources are available for implementation; 2. Metrics are established to evaluate progress; and 3. Transparent information continues to be provided about the distribution of PhD, MFA, and Master's students across campus and the types/amounts of funding available by program/department/school. Many faculty (including Senate reviewers) are unaware of the support their graduate programs receive and having the numbers available aids constructive discussion.

In addition to the overall Implementation Group, reviewers recommended the establishment of a Senate-Administration workgroup to specifically look at how to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives into graduate funding as well as recruitment and retention efforts. Reviewers opined that the report's recommendations do not successfully embed the principle of "diversity goals as programs goals" and lacked support for the recommendation to combine current diversity initiative funding with GEPA funds to create a larger block grant and require programs to devote at least 7% of the block grant to diversity initiatives. This approach appears to be a renewed version of what was proposed in 2021, which was not well-received by Senate reviewers. Focusing on a slice of the block grant and requiring programs to develop three-year plans for diversity that are separate from the strategic plans for admissions and cohort size is not likely to assist many graduate programs in conceptualizing DEI as a foundational and fundamental goal. Devoting approximately seven percent of block grant funds for diversity initiatives may not lead to a significant increase, in terms of dollars, to make meaningful progress. Additionally, the lived experience of many faculty is that when there were centralized programs to support diversity recruitment and graduate support packages, they were more successful in their yield of women and URM applicants and better able to make forward progress toward DEI objectives. Reviewers recognize that the previous programs in their current form are unsustainable, but strongly support taking a fresh approach to

think about how to meaningfully recruit and retain women and URM students. Senate reviewers are supportive of having a structured and focused institutional plan to support DEI recruitment.

Senate Council had the opportunity to discuss the Academic Support Model (ASM) Task Force Report and this report at the same meeting on June 20. This report did not recommend the elimination of GSGEI without further study. The ASM report notes that under current budgetary stressors, continuing to support GSGEI may be unsustainable. If GSGEI is eliminated and the block grant evolves into a new formula, reviewers expressed concern that there will be a tightening in available funding for first-year students, when they are acclimating to their program. Lack of funding to support students in their first year will be inconsistent with the planned growth in graduate education as this onboarding and initial support is crucial for retention. This should be considered by the Implementation workgroup.

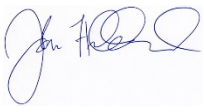
This report did not focus on housing, noting it was ill-equipped to address its many dimensions as a part of this report. While this is understandable, Senate reviewers agreed that the affordability and availability of graduate housing are of paramount importance. The point made in the report that expanding the supply of on-campus graduate housing is vital to allowing graduate students to meet the cost of attendance. If the on-campus housing guarantee increased to five years, it would greatly increase students' availability to focus on their research, degree completion, and career advancement.

The report recommends keeping programs accountable for the funds dedicated to diversity initiatives by submitting reports each year, that would be reviewed by the Graduate Council and GEPA. Reviewers recommend that accountability extend further. The mid-cycle program review check-in (occurring every four years between the eight-year program review cycle) that was previously conducted by the Graduate Council should be reinstated. This would be a positive step toward engaging Graduate Council again in constructively interfacing with the diverse PhD and MFA programs on campus and keeping the Senate apprised of the health of our graduate programs. In academic year 2020-21, Graduate Council collaborated with GEPA to create a streamlined review form to capture program performance. Graduate Council, in consultation with GEPA and the Implementation Workgroup, is well-positioned to take on this assessment task and finalize the work initiated in 2020.

Thank you for your partnership and collaboration to address the challenges our campus faces for graduate education. The underfunding of graduate education due to the large cost increases that have emerged and the budget reductions we may be facing over the next few years is a significant issue for our academic enterprise. The Senate looks forward to working with the Administration as we continue to seek solutions to avoid the risk of shrinking of graduate programs and the accompanying negative impacts on research and teaching.

The Graduate Council, Committee on Diversity & Equity, Committee on Planning & Budget, and Committee on Research reviewed the report. Their comments are attached.

Sincerely,



John A. Hildebrand
Chair
San Diego Divisional Academic Senate

cc: Olivia Graeve, Vice Chair, San Diego Divisional Academic Senate
Lori Hullings, Senate Executive Director
Ashley Hill, Senate Associate Director
Alison Sanders, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs

March 26, 2024

JOHN HILDEBRAND, CHAIR
Academic Senate, San Diego Division

SUBJECT: SAWG Report on the Future of Graduation Education

The Committee on Diversity and Equity (CDE) discussed the SAWG Report on the Future of Graduation Education at its March meeting. The CDE appreciates the amount of work and care that went into this report. The Charge given to this Workgroup was massive and complex, and the Report produced is similarly massive and complex. There is much to appreciate about the Report, including the Workgroup's effort to ground the report in "core values and principles" and not simply devolving into a technocratic discussion of formulas and policies; the admirable attempt to gather together data sources; the concise history and grounding of the many iterations of efforts to confront challenges in graduate education at UCSD; and the complex, comprehensive, and at times creative set of proposals the report puts forth. Given the complexity of this report and how important its recommendations are, do we need more time to render careful and constructive comment?

However, CDE feels that the discussion in the report of the recent changes in the diversity fellowships and the conceptualization and discussion around future recommendations is compartmentalized and thereby misses an opportunity to truly and fully commit to the premise of "viewing diversity goals as program goals" (28). Should there be more effort to think through how other general recommendations impact EDI considerations? Are there unintended consequences to some of the many suggestions for the diversity goals of graduate programs and the holistic diversity goals of the campus? Can diversity as a core value be protected in general context of shrinking resources and increasing costs?

In discussion CDE members opined that, given the complexity of the issues at stake, we should think of devising the future of Graduate education as "a web, not a line," wherein pulling on one issue can disrupt connected issues. The compartmentalized nature of the report makes it harder to see the web. Solutions also need to acknowledge the web. For example, perhaps the three-year plans for diversity (28) should be integral to three-year plans for admissions and cohort size and admissions (33) and plans for Block Grant spending, rather than the proposed 7% to 10 % of the block grant expected to be used for diversity initiatives, reported in prepopulated dropdown menus and field for brief descriptions. Motivated departments might find guidance and suggested best practices in such a system, and for less motivated units these choices become a cover for less effective funding choices and missed opportunities for building or transforming graduate diversity. More to the point, if getting to "viewing diversity goals as program goals" is the objective, focusing on a slice of the block grant may do a disservice to envisioning a three-year plan that conceptualizes diversity as foundational to the fundamental goals (1) and core values (3) of a UC San Diego graduate education in any given department or discipline.

Finally, the CDE noted that the report had a lack of more radical thinking. Its recommendations were largely "around the edges" and marginal suggestions about how to use resources more

effectively and efficiently and optimistic pleas for the administration to seek more support for graduate programs. What would a more radical approach look like?

One example of a lack of radical thinking was brought up by a member of the committee. While supporting the idea that we should not tie graduate cohort size to teaching needs, how then do we teach all of the students, and teach them well, if we do not have sufficient TAs? This member's particular department has historically tried to create opportunities for students to write and get feedback on writing. With large classes, this goal relies on TAs to grade writing and lead sections. TA support is even more important now, with the huge variation in the preparedness of our incoming students. If we reduce our TA size, how do we maintain quality of teaching? The report waves its hands at some alternatives (like undergraduate graders in this case) but, on the whole, recommends grooming the existing sections of the current path rather than envisioning alternatives that address the tensions produced by increasing demands upon already stretched and decreasing resources.

Sincerely,

Ross Frank, Chair
Committee on Diversity and Equity

cc: O. Graeve

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March 15, 2024

JOHN HILDEBRAND, Chair
Academic Senate, San Diego Division

SUBJECT: Review of the Senate-Administration Workgroup Report on the Future of Graduate Education

The Committee on Research (COR) discussed the Senate-Administration Workgroup Report on the Future of Graduate Education at their March 11, 2024 meeting. The Committee is generally supportive of the recommendations, especially the need for predictable and durable multi-year funding and the creation of a Senate-Administration Implementation Group to detail how to implement the proposed changes. Additionally, the Committee offers the following comments for consideration:

The nature of the research enterprise differs across disciplines, of course, and that renders problematic any "one size fits all" approach to ameliorating the tension between graduate funding and research. For example, the Committee cautions against across-the-board syllabi requirements that could make graduate students, and their advisors, feel micromanaged. While a general template can provide guidance on expected outcomes, it will be vitally important to highlight the faculty-students partnership in working toward a common goal. Implementing highly restrictive guidelines that define teaching as distinct from research downgrades the status of graduate students as professionals and leads to micromanaging of research.

COR also echoed the report's recommendation that student cohorts should not be fixed in relation to the needs for undergraduate teaching. Graduate students are deeply aware that the University relies on them to shoulder the responsibility of teaching bigger sections, more sections, but they are also told they are not here to teach. The Committee is concerned that the disparate messaging about teaching, and the increased workload, is negatively affecting graduate students' well-being and mental health.

While the workgroup report's approach chose to focus on principles and goals, the Committee felt strongly that the crux of the matter is the lack of graduate student financial support. Indeed, as the report points out, graduate education cannot be sustained in the current structure. Until funding models are revised to incorporate stable, sustained pay, graduate students will not have the time or the freedom to make independent contributions culminating in their degree.

The Committee would like to emphasize the extremely valuable role graduate education has on supporting the research enterprise of the UC, and we thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the highly complex matter of the future of graduate education. We look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely yours,

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George Fuller, Chair
Committee on Research

cc: A. Chiba
K. Gonzalez
O. Graeve
L. Hullings

March 25, 2024

JOHN HILDEBRAND, CHAIR
Academic Senate, San Diego Division

SUBJECT: SAWG Report on the Future of Graduate Education

The Committee on Planning and Budget (CPB) discussed the SAWG Report on the Future of Graduate Education at its March meeting. The role of graduate students in the core missions of teaching and research at UCSD are paramount, so we were happy to see this report and are appreciative of the efforts of the committee that put it together. We welcome the focus on both the issues that the university faces in graduate student funding as well as the issues that the students themselves face in making the choice to come to UCSD or not.

A number of issues stood out, although the breadth of the problem means that we only focus on a few things.

1. The committee noted that 30% of the students in TA positions are Masters students, not PhD or MFA students, and that the PhD and MFA students should be given priority. The CPB questions the data and definitions here – for example in some programs the model is for students to first be Masters students and then select into doctoral programs, so these students might be classified as Masters students when they are really here for a PhD. A second issue is that in some departments (CSE for example), the PhD students are well funded so many of the TA's are Masters students, however it is unclear that 'fixing' this ratio fixes anything regarding graduate student funding. There is obviously a matching problem across departments, where less Masters students would not mean more PhD students in TA jobs. The CPB suggests looking into this to see if any problem is really being solved.
2. A general issue that arises is the mismatch between funding from various sources and the total cost of a graduate student, which CPB feels could be further examined. In particular incentive effects at the student level and faculty level become important. Some issues:
   (a) Training grants are typically funded at a much lower rate than the student needs to be paid at UCSD. Most faculty do not have unrestricted funds to cover this gap, and federal funding typically cannot be applied to these gaps. It will help, of course, to continue to fund students this way, but there is a strong disincentive for trying to obtain these funds without some way of bridging the funding gap. Perhaps the committee has ideas to help solve this.
   (b) Similarly, smaller grants such as training grants are disincentivized at the administrative level because they bring in little overhead. The CPB was happy to see that this was discussed by the committee, and hope that some solution to this issue can be found.
   (c) One issue not discussed was the different incentives faced by students in choosing between TA and GSR funding. Often students seem to prefer TA jobs based on the differential workloads, and potentially GSR funding goes begging either because there are no graduate students willing to take the jobs or faculty are less inclined to add graduate student funding to grants because of the difficulty in finding graduate students. It seems that this could in part be examined, anecdotal evidence from CPB members suggest it might be a problem where the solution would result in more GSR's.
3. Post-doc vs Graduate student costs to faculty. With the increased costs of graduate students as well as rules on the length of the funding (5 year guarantees at 50%), one expects a move towards faculty

employing more post-doctoral students than less. It was a small point at the end of the report of the committee, but it seems that this has a large implication for graduate student funding. As the report notes faculty funding of graduate students avoids what would be an additional $23m hole in the universities budget, so the implications here should be costed out.

4. The CPB welcomed the committee's ability to compute numbers to go along with the discussion (GSGEI, block grant, TAFTE). It seems appropriate though given the task to have a single source of information on the costs of the graduate program and the sources of funding at a relatively aggregate level. The CPB suggests that this would make the conversations clearer and the choices better understood.
5. Along with point 4 – it seems that understanding macro numbers such as the cost of graduate student TA'ing per student at the campus level would be useful. Along with this a breakdown of the funding of graduate students amongst the different sources of funding (TAFTE, GSR's, etc.) would be welcome.

Sincerely,

Terry Gaasterland, Chair
Committee on Planning & Budget

cc: O. Graeve

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March 28, 2024

PROFESSOR JOHN HILDEBRAND, Chair
Academic Senate, San Diego Division

SUBJECT: Senate-Administration Workgroup Report on the Future of Graduate Education

At its March 11, 2024 meeting, the Graduate Council reviewed the Senate-Administration Workgroup Report on the Future of Graduate Education. The Council is pleased to endorse the report as it nicely and concisely identifies the key issues that are and will become barriers to successful graduate education at UCSD. However, the Council raised significant concerns about the lack of a clear action plan to immediately address these mounting issues and the lack of funding to achieve the goals laid out in the report. The Council provides the following feedback.

The Council is concerned about the proposed methods of increasing revenue. As one example, there is a suggestion to increase Self-Supporting Professional Graduate Degree Programs to generate revenue to fund PhD programs. However, it is unclear whether this approach truly enhances educational programs or depletes intellectual resources that could be allocated elsewhere. Propping up these Master's programs takes time and effort, if done correctly, and there is some concern that if the sole purpose of establishing these programs is to raise revenue, the educational value of these programs may become an afterthought. Increasing core funding to PhD programs should be the priority and a clear financial plan to do so remains obscure.

While there was enthusiasm for the general goals of the document, there was also recognition that many of the recommendations presented have been stated in the past, and that progress has been difficult to achieve. For this reason, the Council recommends that concrete action plans need to be defined for each goal. Echoing the Council's feedback on the systemwide Interim Workgroup Report on the Future of Doctoral Programs at the University of California, GC suggests that each recommendation and goal be accompanied by concrete actions plans, including mention of which parties are responsible for taking action, what types of resources are available to them, and how progress will be evaluated over time.

Sincerely,

Hyo Duk Shin, Vice Chair
Graduate Council

cc: O. Graeve
K. Gonzalez
A. Hill
L. Hullings