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3,700 POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS CALL FOR FIRST UAW CONTRACT AT UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BY END OF THE MONTH

OAKLAND, CA – 3,700 Postdoctoral Researchers at the University of California – who make up more than 60% of the approximately 6,000 working at UC – have signed onto an open letter calling on UC President Mark Yudof to reach agreement by the end of August on a first contract with their Union, PRO/UAW. Postdocs delivered the letter yesterday to the offices of Yudof and the chancellors at all 10 UC campuses.

Postdocs at UC have been organizing to form their Union and make improvements since 2005. Postdoctoral Researchers Organize/International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (PRO/UAW), was certified in November of 2008 and has met with the University for 36 days of negotiations but not agreed on a first contract.

“The 3,700 voices behind this letter make our mandate clear,” said Jennifer Wade, a UC San Francisco Postdoc who researches the genetics of body weight regulation. “Postdocs have spoken, and the University needs to meet their legal obligation to bargain in good faith so that we can bring these historic negotiations to a close with a strong, fully-arbitrable first contract.”

Postdocs play a critical role in the University’s world-renowned research operations: performing complex research in diverse fields, ranging from AIDS and cancer research to developing improved technologies and addressing climate change; publishing scholarly articles; and writing grant proposals. All of this work helps bring more than three billion dollars in grants and contracts to the 10 UC campuses each year. The vast majority of this money comes from federal sources such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF), whose budgets have increased recently as part of the Obama administration’s efforts to reprioritize federal funding of scientific research for its own sake as well as to stimulate economic growth.

“Postdocs make a huge contribution to UC and have waited too long for a contract that secures improvements matching our real value to this institution and to the prestige of science in the US more generally,” added Scott Lindsay, a Postdoc in Biological Sciences at UC San Diego.

After receiving a PhD or equivalent degree, researchers work as Postdocs at UC and other institutions for up to five years in a faculty supervisor’s lab, making up a large and influential portion of the nation’s non-tenured academic research workforce. A recent survey found that Postdocs were the primary author on 43% of the articles in Science magazine, the premiere research journal in the world.

With 6,000 Postdocs, UC employs roughly 10 percent of the Postdocs in the US, making PRO/UAW the largest Postdoc Union in the US.

“We’ve got a pretty good history at University of California, going back to 1999,” said Jim Wells, Director of UAW Region 5, which includes California. UAW Local 2865, he noted, has represented teaching assistants, research assistants, tutors, graders and readers on UC campuses since 1999, negotiating five labor agreements which have improved wages, benefits and working conditions for academic student employees, while enhancing UC’s mission as a leader in undergraduate and graduate education and in scientific research. “A strong first contact for Postdocs makes good sense for the University and for our members, who play such a critical role in the important scientific work that goes on at UC,” said Wells.

“It’s time for UC officials to get off the dime,” said UAW Vice President James Settles, who directs the UAW Technical, Office and Professional (TOP) servicing department, which assists in contract negotiations for a wide range of UAW members in higher education, gaming, health care public service, and other sectors. “Our members chose their union, elected their bargaining committee, and we’re ready to get the job done at the bargaining table. If the UC will bargain in good faith, we can achieve a good contract that will make everyone proud.”

The UAW represents workers at more than 40 universities and colleges nationwide, including 25,000 Academic Student Employees (ASEs) – Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Graders, Tutors, and others – at the University of California, California State University, University of Washington, and University of Massachusetts.

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