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Union members, UCLA faculty demand ‘real action’ from UC at UAW Local 4811 rally



Members of United Auto Workers Local 4811 march toward Bruin Plaza. The union held a rally Tuesday afternoon and called on the UC to resolve its unfair labor practices. (Zoraiz Irshad/Daily Bruin senior staff)



By **Alexandra Crosnoe**

May 28, 2024 6:32 p.m.

Correction: The original version of this article misattributed Yunyi Li's speech to Zizi Li.

This post was updated May 28 at 9:58 p.m.

Around 200 people gathered at Bruin Plaza on Tuesday to show support for the ongoing United Auto Workers Local 4811 strike.

UCLA members of UAW Local 4811 – which represents academic student employees, graduate students, and academic and postdoctoral researchers – began picketing at 9 a.m. in Dickson Plaza after union leadership called on them Thursday to “stand up” beginning Tuesday. This move comes after 79% of participating members voted in favor

May 13-15 to authorize a strike – if leadership deemed it necessary – in protest of the University’s arrests of and use of force on pro-Palestine protesters across the UC.

Picketing union members chanted, “Stand up, fight back,” and marched to Bruin Plaza at 12 p.m., where they joined members of Faculty for Justice in Palestine at UCLA and other supporters of the strike. Members of the University Council-American Federation of Teachers – a union representing UC librarians and non-tenured faculty members – and University Professional and Technical Employees also joined the rally.

“We’re prepared to be out here through finals, through graduation, to make sure that there will be no business as usual unless UC corrects their unlawful actions,” said doctoral candidate Yunyi Li in a speech at the rally. “UC can be on the right side of history by taking accountability for their actions by coming to an agreement with organizers over amnesty, divestment and policing.”

The rally began with UAW Local 4811 members criticizing Chancellor Gene Block’s response to the Palestine solidarity encampment, and one union member in a white wig performed a satirical impression of Gene Block. The performer listed several policies Block has made since the Palestine solidarity encampment sweep on May 2, including the creation of a new Office of Campus Safety and the decision to bring more law enforcement officers to campus – which the audience booed.

“We don’t need big words,” said Candace, a member of UAW Local 4811 who did not give her last name, in a speech. “We need some real action.”

The union filed an unfair labor practice violation against the UC on May 3, alleging that the university had failed its responsibility as an employer by allowing police to use force against its members during the encampment sweep.

The union amended its ULP charge against the UC on May 10 to demand amnesty for union members arrested at UCLA and UC Irvine and to end the suspension of pro-Palestine protesters at UC Irvine and UC San Diego. It issued another ULP charge May 21 that claimed the University violated its bargaining agreement with UAW Local 4811 when it instituted a new policy requiring that arrested employees undergo the employee disciplinary process without consulting or notifying the union.

“We need to resolve this unfair labor practice, and to do that, we need amnesty for all students arrested for protesting,” Candace said.



The UC has claimed that the strike is unlawful, saying it violates a no-strike clause made in collective bargaining agreements between the groups in 2022. Mary Osako, UCLA's vice chancellor of strategic communications, said in an emailed statement that the strike would impede students' abilities to learn.

"Our talented students are getting ready for finals, and UCLA's focus is doing whatever we can to support them," she said in the statement. "Students want to hear their professors teach, not the piercing sounds of trumpets, drums and slogans being shouted right outside their classroom windows."

UC-AFT joined UAW Local 4811 in filing a ULP charge against the UC on May 15, which said the University violated faculty free speech rights, failed to maintain safe working conditions and did not consult members of the union when making decisions regarding online instruction following protests at UCLA and UC San Diego.

The ULP charge could lead to a strike authorization vote in the future, said UC-AFT President Katie Rodger in a press release May 15. The union also held a vote of no confidence in Block, with 79% of members voting to approve the measure, according to a Friday press release by UC-AFT.

"In the previous strike, we saw how administrators attempted to undermine the strength by pressuring lecturers and librarians to take on work of our striking colleagues," said Caroline Luce, UC-AFT's chair of the communications committee. "We wanted to be here today to make it clear that we will not be pitted against one another."

A letter read at an FJP rally May 9 stated that members of the faculty group would not participate in struck labor if UAW Local 4811 authorized a strike. Since then, over 1,000 UC staff and faculty members – including over 600 UCLA staff faculty – have signed the letter.

"We're here as a part of the faculty solidarity alliance to stand up for the rights of our students – in particular, today, for the graduate students," said Matt Barreto, a professor of Chicana/o and Central American studies and political science, in an interview. "We will not pick up any struck labor, and we will not cross the picket line in support of our students."

At the rally, Elisheva Gross, a lecturer in the department of psychology, read from a letter signed by 78 Jewish faculty members. The letter included several demands for the University, including amnesty for students and faculty arrested during pro-Palestine

protests, an acknowledgement that Block was wrong to attribute violence to the encampment, and freedom from harassment for all UCLA students.

“It is dangerous to frame all critiques of the state or government of Israel or all critiques of Zionism as antisemitic,” Gross said during the rally. “We also reject the narrative pitting Jews against pro-Palestine protesters.”

UAW Local 4811 members voted to authorize the strike through June 30. Anny Viloría Winnett, the unit chair of the union, said she believes the protests are important for holding the university to account.

“It is also a sacrifice. A strike means that we are foregoing our pay and that we are not teaching our students, that we’re not in the classroom,” said Viloría Winnett, who is a doctoral student in public health. “We’re actually giving up a lot, but we think this is the most important tool we have in this moment to address such a difficult situation.”

Contributing reports by Sam Mulick and Shiv Patel, Daily Bruin staff.

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