

GSA Resolution in Support of the Creation of a Graduate Student Cross-Cultural Space at UC Merced

Background: Within the last academic year, there is ongoing discussion and organizing among undergraduate students for the creation of a cross-cultural center on campus, but there is currently limited plans for the creation of a cross-cultural space for graduate students. Student Services Building 350, otherwise known as the “Gradpad”, is supposed to be a social and academic space designated for all graduate students at UC Merced. However, graduate students of color and LGBTQ+ students, across many identity groups, have experienced several transgressions in the “Gradpad”, making it an unsafe space where graduate students of color and LGBTQ+ students are targeted and oppressive comments have been made. These comments are not just limited to the GradPad, as these comments have also been made across the campus at UC Merced. This violates the UC Merced Principles of Community, Title VII, and Title IX, and creates even greater barriers for the well-being and success of graduate students of color and LGBTQ+ students who are already underrepresented and underserved at the university. Graduate students of color and LGBTQ+ students deserve the right to feel safe in our campus community.

Preamble: We affirmatively raise the issue of race discrimination and harassment; express strong disapproval of race discrimination and harassment; develop appropriate sanctions for race discrimination and harassment; advocate for the administration to inform graduate students of their rights and instructing them to report race discrimination and harassment; and develop methods to sensitize all graduate students to behavioral indicators of race discrimination and harassment and the gravity of its consequences.

Purpose: The purpose of this resolution is to support the efforts of creating a graduate student cross-cultural space at UC Merced that fosters diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Whereas: Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Charles Nies has said, “Diversity enriches our research and academic missions... We have remained committed to creating a campus that welcomes diversity” (2015); and,

Whereas: Graduate students of color, such as Latinas/os, African Americans, Native Americans, Southeast Asians, and Pacific Islanders are underrepresented minorities within the total graduate student population of UC Merced, in which there are seventy Latina/o graduate students, ten black graduate students, one Native American graduate student, forty-five Asian graduate students, and three Pacific Islander graduate students, out of 448 total graduate students at UC Merced. UC Merced is often referred to as the most diverse UC campus; however, the graduate student population at UC Merced has inverted racial and ethnic diversity statistics for students of color, in contrast to the undergraduate student population. Additionally, there is limited data and services for LGBTQ+ students at UC Merced, including no formal graduate student clubs and/or organizations. These demographics contradict the California Master Plan in which the University of California is supposed to be representative of the diversity of the State of California; and,

Whereas: Graduate students of color and LGBTQ+ students come from diverse identities and backgrounds, encompassing different racial groups, ethnicities, first nations, skin colors, genders, sexes, sexualities, incomes, classes, occupations, housing statuses, nationalities, heritages, geographic locations, languages, immigration statuses, citizenship statuses, legal

statuses, family statuses, educations, religions, spiritualities, abilities, sizes, ages, and more; and,

Whereas: UC Merced is the only UC without a cultural center of any kind, such as, but not limited to, a Cross-Cultural Center, Women's Center, LGBTQ+ Center, etc.; and,

Whereas: The UC Merced 2020 plan does not provide detail for a designated, permanent space for a cultural center of any kind; and,

Whereas: Pedagogical scholar Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2012) notes, "Why do students need cultural centers in the 21st century? ... The answer to this question lies in the reality of life in the United States and on our college campuses... Despite advertising themselves as open and democratic spaces where the marketplace of ideas allows for different and divergent viewpoints, many college and university campuses remain difficult places for students of color [and LGBTQ+ students] to negotiate... these places that we believe should be safe havens are often not... Students of color [and LGBTQ+ students] often report feeling isolated and misunderstood in a culture of predominately White (heteronormative) institutions... They are less likely to use conventional university services like academic advisors, counseling centers, or mainstream student organizations to deal with their feelings and concerns... Thus, the student cultural center becomes a source of support and comfort... In addition to providing social and psychological support for students of color [and LGBTQ+ students], well-developed centers also serve as an important educational corrective. These centers support lectures, artistic exhibits, workshops, performing arts, and library collections beyond the typical campus offerings... They are places where members of the mainstream and members of a variety of cultural groups can learn about the history, culture, and experiences of others..."; and,

Whereas: There have been reported incidents of the racialized and sexualized climate in the Gradpad and across campus, such as emails to the Campus Climate Director, GSA GradPad space survey results, police report, reported incidents to the Special Advisor to GSA on Climate, Diversity, and Equity, confidential Title IX complaints, etc., making the space unsafe for graduate students of color and LGBTQ+ students; and

Whereas: The socio-emotional well-being of graduate students of color and LGBTQ+ students affects mental health, retention rates, and creates more barriers to completion of graduate programs; and

Whereas: This is exacerbated by a lack of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual diversity among the graduate student population, as well as a lack of support services and resources provided by the university, and healthy academic mentorship opportunities in which there are limited (tenured) faculty of color and LGBTQ+ faculty; and

Whereas: A graduate student cross-cultural space will promote principles of intersectionality, diversity, inclusivity, and equity by providing graduate students a safe cultural space to be successful; and,

Therefore be it resolved that: The Graduate Student Association (GSA) at the University of California, Merced publically supports the efforts of the creation of a graduate student cross-cultural space, by sending out an email to all graduate students stating said support and working towards creating an inclusive culture at UC Merced, such as through programming efforts, and by issuing an official letter of support to the Graduate Dean, Campus Climate

Director, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and Chancellor outlining the reasons why a graduate student cross-cultural space is important and necessary at UC Merced, and asking for their support in establishing a graduate student cross-cultural space and inclusive campus; and

Therefore be it further resolved that: The Graduate Student Association at the University of California, Merced establishes a permanent, voting position in the GSA to work on issues of diversity, climate, equity, and inclusion via the GSA Constitution and Bylaws. This position will serve as an official liaison between graduate students and university officials; and

Therefore be it finally resolved that: The Graduate Student Association at the University of California, Merced advocates for the prompt hiring of a holistic retention coordinator in the Graduate Division dedicated to cultivating the well-being of graduate students; and that the Graduate Division in partnership with the Graduate Dean's Advisory Council on Diversity, Office of Campus Climate, and Social Justice programs in the Office of Student Life consults with an intersectional task force of graduate students of color and graduate LGBTQ+ students designated by the Special Advisor to GSA on Climate, Diversity, and Equity in the creation of a graduate student cross-cultural space, and to provide consistent, intersectional support services, resources, financial support, and anti-oppression programming to improve the climate for graduate students of color and LGBTQ+ students at UC Merced.