

Center for Racial Justice UC Santa Cruz



March 12, 2024

The Center for Racial Justice (CRJ) urges our faculty colleagues to exercise academic flexibility with regard to students in their classes as winter quarter comes to a close. Over the past several years, in the midst of world-shattering crises, we've had to ask ourselves what it means for us to carry on as usual—for us to keep on teaching and our students to keep on learning when the world is collapsing around us. We have tempered the need to adjust to new footing with responsiveness to our students' material conditions. As teachers and mentors, we worked with students as they navigated abrupt returns home, the deaths of loved ones, and intensified racial violence and inequality.

We recognize that the world does not stop at the door of our classrooms. In Spring 2020, following the police murder of George Floyd, the Black Student Union (BSU) sent out a mass-email with the searing subject heading, “The Unrelenting Antiracism of 2020,” which closed with a call for support:

Finally, to expect Black students to complete final exams during times of high uncertainty and violence is inconsiderate and abusive. And while this expectation is placed on all University students, those who are the most affected are students who come from the same cities engulfed in flames right now; the most affected are Black students who for years, not just these last couple of weeks, have been reminded of the deadly nature by which the state intentionally approaches Black Life. We protest this responsibility amidst such turbulent times and we expect your support, at the administrative level, to relieve us from submitting and participating in the extra burden of final examinations without consequence.

In powerful affirmation, the entire Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) team responded to BSU and all ABC students: “We see you. We hear you. We value you. We are here 24/7 to support you.” Taking stock of the ubiquity of white supremacy in the university, CAPS further committed to “dismantling systems of oppression within ourselves, CAPS, our unit, on-campus and off.” Crucially, CAPS called on all departments to exercise immediate across-the-board academic flexibility toward our students, furnishing our students with relief where and when possible. The Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) and the Committee on Courses of Instruction (CCI) swiftly followed suit, issuing an [exception to the final exam policy](#).

We are now into the sixth month of Israel's genocide of the Palestinian people. Students across campus report the toll of witnessing proliferating scenes of carnage from Gaza on an hourly basis from their phones. Like members of our faculty, some of these students have family in Palestine and are living in a constant state of fear for their loved ones. On a campus famed for its activism, we

have witnessed our students galvanized by the horrifying extermination of life into extraordinary, moving organizing—holding numerous teach-ins, rallies, sit-ins, protests, and community events every single week for almost half a year now. Even as they have ceaselessly mobilized against the genocide, they have simultaneously called attention to their struggles to pay rent, their fears about not being able to secure housing in a lottery system, their inability to afford more than one meal a day, and their outrage at the perilous working conditions that their *tías* and *tíos* face on this campus. Indeed, they have connected these struggles through comparative and relational analyses of university spending. As is painfully clear, these are not conditions in which our students can study or thrive.

There are conversations to be had about the role of the university in serving as a site of needed critique in times of crisis and the disproportionate toll on scholars of color of doing public scholarship during such times. For now, we wish to underscore that the CRJ operates on the principle that the public university is not, nor should it be, moated from the world in which we live. In that spirit, we call on our colleagues who are teaching this quarter to meet our students where they are at—be it in the form of flexibility around attendance, final exams, and final projects; willingness to accept late or alternative assignments; and/or support for incompletes and/or P/NP options—and in doing so to offer a modicum of relief during an impossible time.