



september-october 2024

in this issue

diversity equity & inclusion
newsletter

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US DEI efforts and research funding trajectories in our current sociopolitical climate.



by Edi M-L Wipf, PhD
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In the last 3 years, more than **100 bills** seeking to restrict or eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives have been introduced by U.S. lawmakers in over 30 states. These **measures** include prohibiting the promotion, sponsoring, or

maintenance of courses, workshops, speakers, offices, and/or programs involved in DEI education, support, and development. A little over a year ago, affirmative action was **upended** in college admissions by the Supreme Court, and this was recently joined by the **Dismantle DEI Act**, introduced in June by Ohio **Senator JD Vance**, which proposes the abolishment of all “federal DEI programs and end DEI-related funding for agencies, contractors, organizations and educational accreditation agencies that receive federal funding.”

As we look to navigate an ever-evolving social, economic, and political environment, what are current and future impacts of such policies, our institutions, and our individual actions on greater societal progress and scientific advancement? In attempts to support engagement with this question, included here is information on various intersections across DEI efforts, STEM research, government, and investments that help drive what is possible.

DEI and science funding

Historically, U.S. federal agencies making substantial contributions to STEM and DEI include the Departments of Education (DE), Energy (DOE), and Agriculture (USDA), as well as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

"The DEI agenda is a destructive ideology that breeds hatred and racial division. It has no place in our federal government or anywhere else in our society."

—J.D Vance
Vice Presidential Candidate



photo: Cage Skidmore

Administration (NOAA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and National Institutes of Health (NIH). **Their support** has been directed towards 1) pathways to and through higher education and 2) additional career development, including partnering with Minority-Serving Institutions, offering training opportunities to people from traditionally underserved communities, and identifying inequities within the science community and workforce.

Financial backing of these agencies has fluctuated widely the last several decades with varying times of economic growth and contraction. During the 2017-2021 Trump Administration, each annual budget proposal called for cuts up to \$13.2 billion for research and development funding and regulatory agencies, though Congress still moderately (0.4-3%) raised **discretionary budget caps** every year. Removal and reassignment of federal government scientists - which included a 2% and 6% decrease in the scientific workforces for the U.S. Geological Survey and Environmental Protection Agency, respectively—occurred, in addition to other roll-backs on environmental regulations and censorship of research findings

(see: **Politics v. science: How President Trump's war on science impacted public health and environmental regulation.**)

In President Biden's first **address to Congress** in 2021, he spoke of how "we will see more technological change in the next 10 years than we saw in the last 50 years. And we're falling behind in that competition. Decades ago we used to invest 2% of our [Gross Domestic Product] on research and development. Today, we spend less than 1%. China and other countries are closing in fast. We have to develop and dominate the products and technologies of the future: advanced batteries, biotechnology, computer chips, and clean energy." Despite certain measures—such as the 2022 **CHIPS and Science Act** authorizing increased **research funding**—spending cuts have still amounted to significantly less investment in recent years (see: **US science agencies on track to hit 25-year funding low**). This year alone, Congress **reduced NSF's budget by 8%**.

Interestingly, **polls** geared towards gauging Americans' trust in scientists and their views of science have shown that 78% of Americans "find government investments in scientific research

aimed at advancing knowledge are usually worthwhile for society over time,” with a breakdown of 90% of Democrats versus 68% of Republicans holding this view. A little more than half of both Democrats and Republicans (56% and 51%, respectively) responded that it is very important for the United States to be a world leader in scientific achievements.

response & impacts

Within the scientific community, there are some **proponents of cutting DEI efforts**, stating that “diverting funding from science into activities unrelated to the production of knowledge undermines science’s ability to serve humankind. When funding agencies politicize science by using their power to further a particular ideological agenda, they contribute to public mistrust in science. Hijacking science funding to promote DEI is thus a threat to our society.”

There is evidence, however, that current **anti-DEI legislature** and funding reductions could foreseeably halt and reverse progress towards greater **scientific innovation, productivity**, and



photo: AP

above: President Biden signing the CHIPS and Science Act in August, 2022.





photo: UCB

addressing inequality, with impacts ranging from reduced **accuracy and generalizability** of clinical trial findings to increased **risk of attrition in STEM** fields by individuals of marginalized identities.

According to a **2023 report** from NSF's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, workforce and diversity trends over the last decade indicate that greater numbers of Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Alaska Native people collectively, as well as women, are employed in STEM and are earning more degrees in science and engineering fields at all levels compared to previous years. Such jobs are associated with **higher wages and lower unemployment** rates and have long-term **implications** for population health and economic output. About 3% of STEM workers are people with disabilities, and this has largely remained unchanged.

While the effects of current policies and measures on such trends still remain to be determined, **inconsistent federal research funding** is highly disruptive, where, for instance, planning larger, multi-year initiatives that typically involve

graduate student sponsorship and faculty recruitment, as well as possible undergraduate research opportunities, become more difficult or unfeasible. With the University of California, Berkeley's own **R1 status benefits, international engagement, 2022-2023 research sponsorship** of over 65% by federal and state government, as well as **record-breaking fundraising** of \$1.311 billion this past fiscal year, varying impacts of state and federal politics on the campus research community are likely and arguably important to consider.

the upcoming election & what we invest in

Across each of our varying spheres of influence and abilities to affect change, voting by those who are U.S. citizens in the upcoming election is one area of great focus at the moment.

While **voter suppression** has been an ongoing concern, the ACLU published in July a "**road-map** to combat voting rights threats posed by a second Trump term." As for what stance the Democratic and Republican nominees have so far

expressed on **key science issues**, Donald Trump has pledged to rescind many of Biden's policies on climate, energy, and equity - including the executive order on **Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through The Federal Government** - while Kamala Harris has shown support for current **Biden administration's policies**.

On a national scale, the immense influence of government spending and regulations on STEM domestically and globally may necessitate much greater mechanisms to safeguard science against political interference, corruption with conflicts of interests from industry, and the rights of scientists to freely share findings and correct misinformation. One response to such a need has been a joint initiative established by the Climate Science Legal Defense Fund and Sabin Center for Climate Change Law in 2016, in which the creation of the **Silencing Science Tracker** documents instances of U.S. government censorship, researcher self-censorship, bias and misrepresentation, budget cuts, personnel changes, and other research hindrances.

reflection questions:

What do you think and/or feel is the impact of current anti-DEI legislation on your research community? What about for the future of science?

How might we be holding ourselves, as well as organizations, including Berkeley, accountable for fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive society that promotes scientific discovery, innovation, and adaptability?

Is there a recent area in your life that stands out to you as something you would like to newly—or further—invest in? How might it relate to the impact you intend to have with your work, as well as diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging?

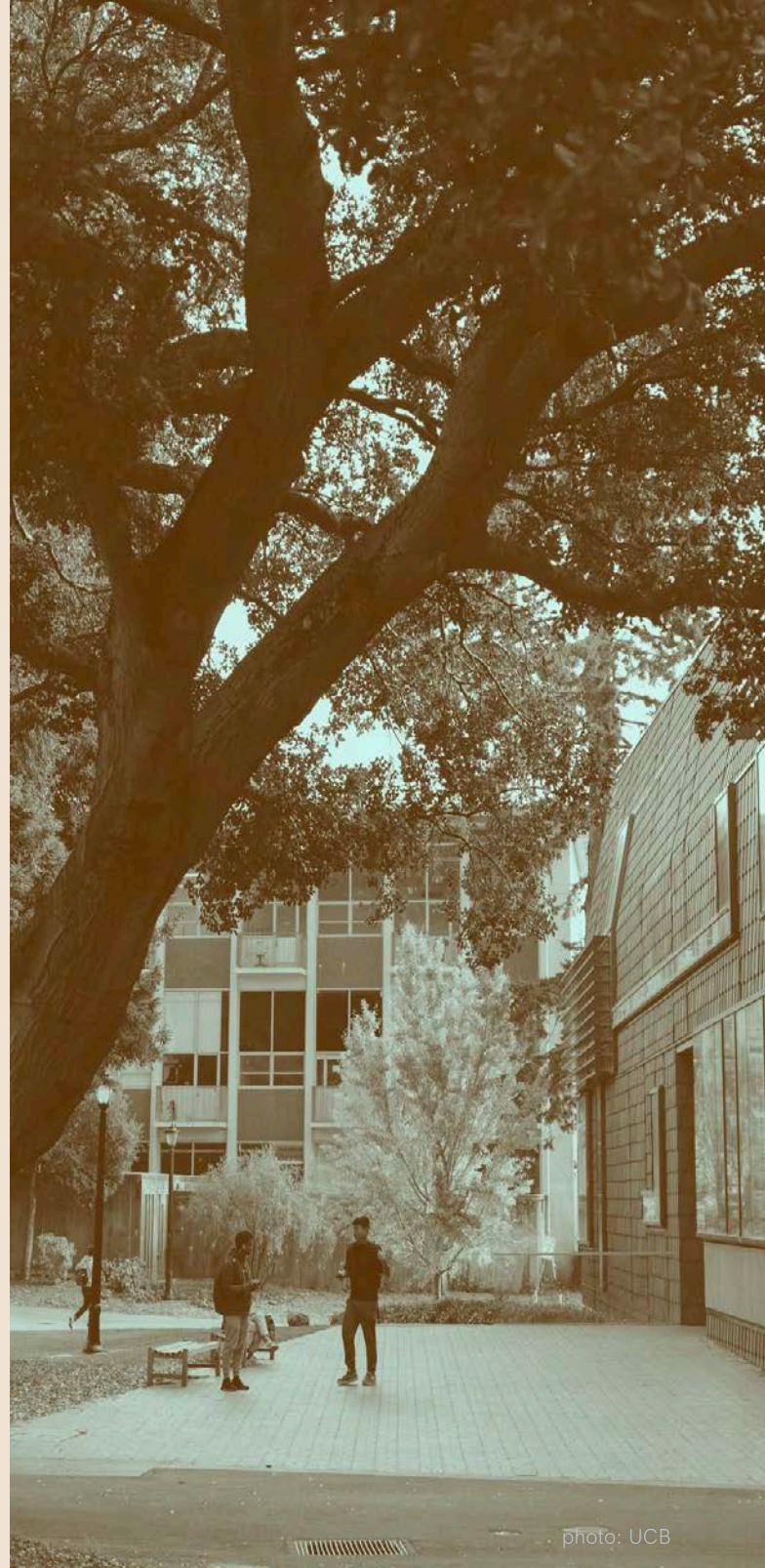


photo: UCB

above: Music Library, and the Anthropology and Art Practice Building

renting from uc berkeley

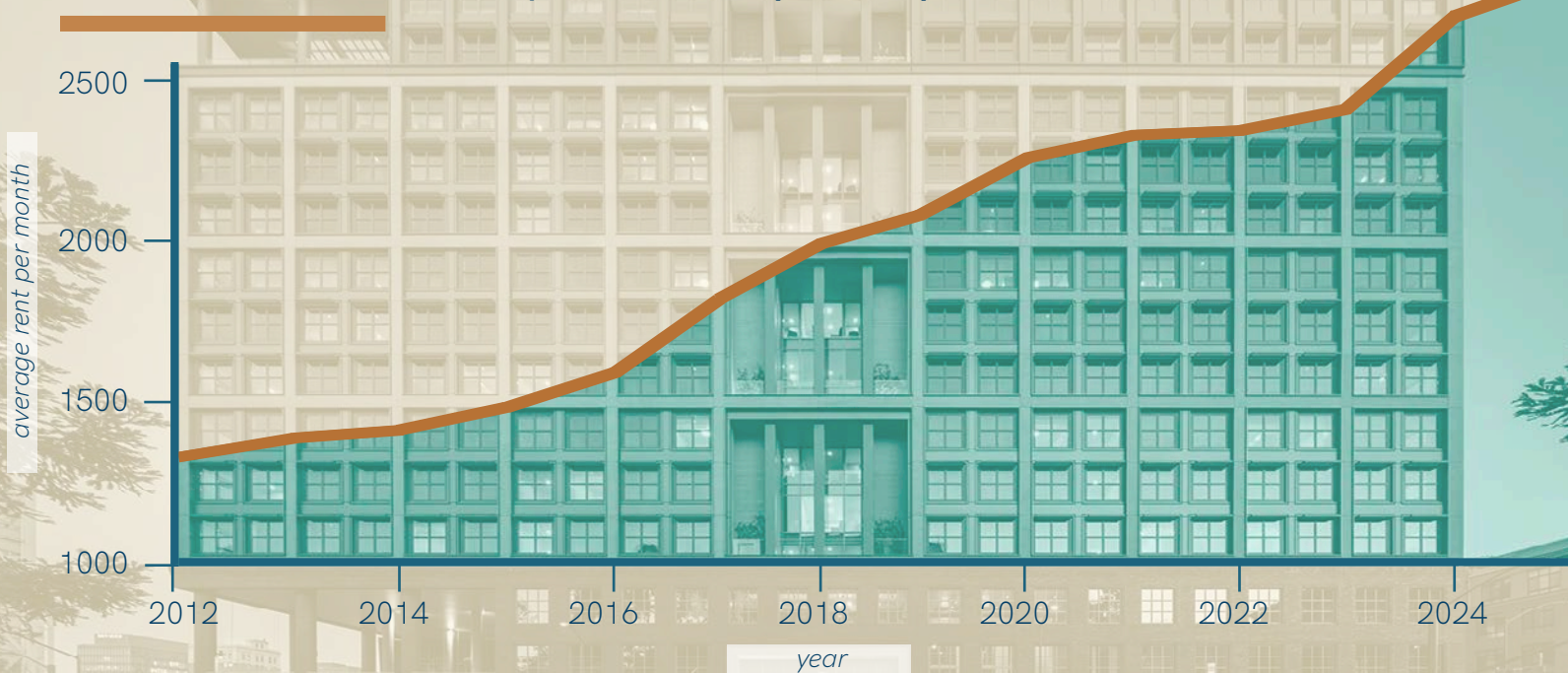
by Gregory Arena
PhD candidate

This month, UC Berkeley christens two of its newest campus housing options, **Anchor House** for transfer students and **xučyun ruwway** Graduate Apartments at Albany Village. On 30 July, UC Berkeley also broke ground on construction of a massive undergraduate housing project at the former site of People's Park. Together, these efforts seek to address a housing crisis identified by both the UC and City of Berkeley in 2017. In the seven years that have intervened, the University has added over 2,313 beds to the campus housing roster. Construction at People's Park and at two recently identified sites on Bancroft Avenue and Channing Way will add an estimated additional 3,800 beds, bringing the campus closer to its long term goal of **8,000 new beds**. Less than a decade ago, UC Berkeley provided housing for only 23% of the student population, far below any other UC campus. But how has added housing affected market prices and housing accessibility for students and community members seeking to live in the Berkeley area?

While students struggle to find housing in the Bay Area, inflated costs are one of the greatest

challenges many face. Speaking to **Berkeleyside** in August, Adam Ratliff, a spokesperson for UC Berkeley's Student Affairs division, extolled the rental cost and amenities offered at the recently completed Anchor House, noting that the UC "price[s] our units to be at or below market (depending on unit-type) and any excess revenues go 100% to student financial aid." However, based on listing prices, a single studio for the fall and spring semester costs \$21,695 for the 8 months, 20 day contract period. Meanwhile, a single room in a shared three or four bedroom apartment is \$19,995 for the same contract period. This means that the most affordable options at Anchor House are still more expensive than the median costs of an unfurnished studio in Berkeley, which averages \$1999 per month. While the University frequently points to other amenities provided by dormitory housing which include a fitness center, communal kitchen, rooftop gardens, and a game room, others have called the construction "**lavish**," and a "**luxury hotel**." Local urban planner and architect David Masenten complimented the recent construction as "nicer than any Ritz Carltons I've seen."

median initial rent for one-bedroom apartments in the city of Berkeley



data sourced from Zillow ©2024

Photos of the Anchor House interior spaces and courtyards reveal an elegant blend of modern and traditional design elements carefully chosen to instill a deep sense of belonging for a long overlooked and underserved transfer student population. Weighing the added value found in the amenities and quality of life students will enjoy at Anchor House may very well make the steep price a comparative bargain, but a bargain only for those with the money to afford these added services. Undergrads with an annual family income of \$80,000 account for **54%** of the UC population. That same percentage of students pay no tuition. Among transfer students that number is higher, at **62%**. While this progressive financial aid package known as the **Blue and Gold Plan** represents a tremendous effort by the UC system to fulfill a commitment to Californians of all economic backgrounds, this **financial aid does not cover or reduce rent**. Financial aid intended specifically for housing at UC Berkeley is highly competitive. Or, it comes in the form of student loans or work-study, which may place students

in debt or extend the time required to graduate as students must balance jobs and schooling. Anchor House, constructed specifically for transfer students, may simply not be attainable for a demographic that historically ranked among the campuses most financially strained.

According to the Anchor House designers, “the entire complex was designed to be a ‘transformative’ experience that tends to residents’ emotional, mental and physical needs.” But striving to provide students with mental, emotional and physical balance should not come at the cost of students’ ability to balance their pocket books. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Basic Needs Center reports that **39%** of Berkeley Students have experienced food insecurity, while 10% of students have been unhoused for any period of time. In the hierarchy of needs, meeting these basic essentials must take priority.

At present, creating access to campus resources behind a paywall of steep rental rates risks

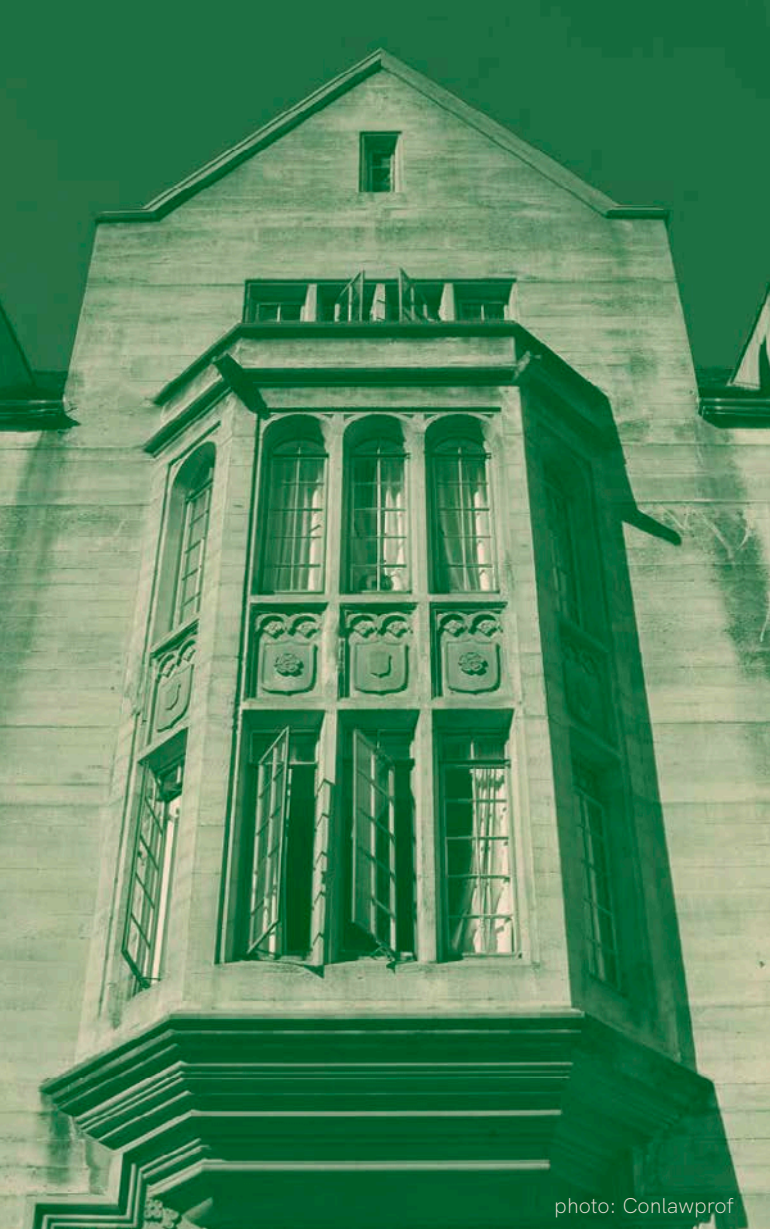


photo: Conlawprof

left: Bowels Hall. Situated at the top of campus, the dormitory, constructed in 1929, was California's first state-owned residence hall.

50% of their take-home pay in rent to the University. And with top-earning graduate students making close to \$58,000 per year while bottom earners in departments like IB make below \$32,000 per year, no graduate student will be spending less than one third of their take-home on rent at these units. Because of the exemption privileges that UC enjoys regarding local and certain state property laws, tenants of the UC do not enjoy the same rights as those renting in the private market. Tenants of the UC do not have equal protection from eviction, or the right to dispute arbitrary rent increase.

Campus administrators have long thrown up their hands, pointing to market pressures and runaway Bay Area prices as an unstoppable driving force when justifying the high cost of university provided housing. But in lamenting these allegedly insurmountable market forces, the university forgets to mention that the UC is the largest single land-lord in the city of Berkeley and in the state of California. UC is therefore a willing participant in shaping the local and regional rental market. Dr. Davarian L. Baldwin, a professor at Trinity Colleges, studies the economics of university housing and real estate. The UC system is a prominent case study in his work. In a 2022 interview with **the New Republic**, he explained the unique relationship between the role of the UC as a landlord and how UC development impacts regional cost of living. "For the U.C.," notes Dr. Baldwin, "tax exemptions on land holdings help funnel private investors into 'innovation' districts and glitzy development projects around campuses—often derided in the refrain, 'U.C. stands for 'under construction.'"

Construction of surplus housing by colleges—what Dr. Baldwin refers to as "univercities" is rarely the solution. UC's 2024-2025 budget totals \$51.4 billion. According to **UC Annual Financial Reports**, real estate investment provides for 7% of annual revenue, projected to reach \$5

stratifying the Berkeley experiences along the lines of socio-economic privileges.

Looking at the costs of recently constructed xučyun ruwway Graduate Apartments in neighboring city of Albany, a furnished single occupancy studio apartment lists for \$2,121 per month. A cost comparison on Zillow reveals the average studio apartment at \$1,794 per month in that area. Adjusting for expected utilities (which are included at xučyun ruwway) these new units are similarly priced to other options in Albany. Even still, average graduate student salaries at UC Berkeley sit just below \$46,000 per year. This means that the average graduate student living in xučyun ruwway in Fall 2024 will be paying over

median cost of studio apartment in Berkeley



BSC non-profit

private for-profit

UC housing

billion by 2025. Reliance by the UC on real estate investment is only anticipated to grow as federal and state funding continues to flag. At present, steep rent is in the university's best interest. Not only do the legal exemptions and financial motivations reflect in the price of UC controlled rentals, but also in where UC chooses to construct these rentals.

Anchor House was built in-part on the site of a 112 year old, rent-controlled apartment building located at 1921 Walnut Street. It's not the first time UC has leveraged its exception from the California Constitution to override tenant protections and **seize property**. The derelict **Anna Head Girls School**, Berkeley Student Cooperative **Cloyne Court Hotel**, **California Schools for the Deaf and Blind** (now Clark Kerr Campus), and an entire city block that for 55 years was known as **People's Park** were all acquired through this same process. In each case the **UC has demonstrated**

itself to have little regard for how it impacts its **neighbors** in the greater Berkeley community. The destruction of 1921 Walnut Street meant the loss of affordable housing options available to both students and non-students in Berkeley.

Ironically, the benefactor of Anchor House, **Helen Diller**, was heiress to the fortune her husband, Sanford Diller, amassed through his company **Prometheus Real Estate Group**. Formerly the largest private company holding apartments in the Bay Area, housing advocates have long derided Prometheus as a critical player in the last three decades of Bay Area gentrification, mass eviction, and inflation of rental rates. In 2018, the Group spent \$246,800 in local East Bay elections to reverse or impede **rent control** and nearly \$3 million to defeat Propositions 10 and 21 that would have expanded rent control in the state of California. In 2016, the group was sued for exposing tenants to asbestos, bed bugs,

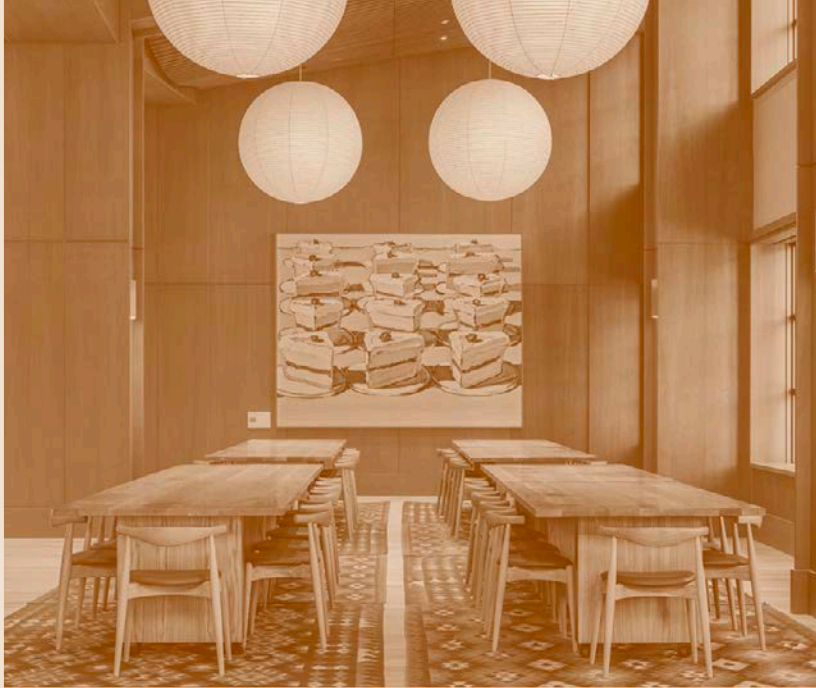
raw sewage and serious habitability issues. Yet partnerships with developers like Prometheus plot a path increasingly taken by UC Berkeley to both fund and guide campus projects.

Emily Marthinsen was a campus planner for UC Berkeley for nearly ten years. During her tenure at Berkeley she served as an Assistant Vice-Chancellor and Campus Architect and has **chronicled the transformation** in how universities like Berkeley approach campus development. Marthinsen points to privatization of UC Berkeley projects as a hallmark transformation in campus planning over the last two decades. Initially, declining state and federal funding and increased costs of labor and materials created a positive feedback loop that drove increased partnership between the campus and private investors. More recently, Marthinsen notes that “influential alumni and donors—many of them real estate developers—who believed that campus staff lacked the skills to manage projects, that the campus was incapable of delivering construction projects on time and on budget” offered their expertise to manage and dictate these projects.

Public-private partnerships have allowed for rapid infrastructural growth but with a buried cost to the students and community. Private investors expect a return on their investment. That means making student housing profitable. “What everyone ignored, from the very beginning,” says Marthinsen “is that higher education is its own sector. Its values, programs, and mission are quite different from other industries—and, specifically, different from those of for-profit businesses. Providing living spaces for students is not the same thing as building apartment complexes, even if they share characteristics.” Profit is not a stated mission of the University of California. Yet increasingly residence halls at UC Berkeley are conceived and operated by private companies. At UC Berkeley, “students in privately developed and managed residence halls (built and/or renovated on university-owned land) pay more than students in university owned and managed residence halls.” Anchor House exemplifies this template, offering all the tangible amenities associated with the **luxury student housing boom**, while also managed by a for-profit corporation. **Oski 360**, a subsidiary LLC set up by the **Helen Diller Family Foundation**, will coordinate the management of the new dorm.



demolition of 1921 Walnut Street, a rent controlled apartment and now site of Anchor House.



Advocates for affordable housing see UC Berkeley's approach to housing as largely responsible for the tremendous housing scarcity and inflated rental prices in the City of Berkeley. But that also means that if UC is to reform its housing model, it will be part of the solution. Speaking to Berkeley-Side in 2021, **Leah Simon-Weisberg**, chair of the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board proposes that UC Berkeley shift its living unit management to a non-profit model to soften the rental costs borne by students and the public. Such a model has already proven to be a feasible option in Berkeley. The **Berkeley Student Cooperative** celebrated its 90th Anniversary in 2023.

The housing cooperative has provided a range of affordable housing options as a non-profit to both undergraduate and graduate students. With pressure of inflation and the delayed costs of Covid, the BSC recently increased rent by 9%. Even still, residents of the BSC can expect to pay no more than **\$1000 per month**, utilities included, for a studio or shared apartment. While accommodations are simple, rent is less than half the current market rate. As the second largest individual housing provider in the city—operating 17 units, and 1400 beds—the BSC has long acted as a counterweight in the local rental market. Were UC Berkeley to lower dorm rental prices, it could substantially reduce rental inflation in the East Bay.



Scenes of Anchor House, a recently opened dorm for junior transfer students.

As UC Berkeley continues to construct new dormitories and manage existing real estate, it must return to its guiding four-part mission—education, research, public service and healthcare. Upholding that mission is only possible when affordable housing is available to our student population and the people who make this university run. The long term pursuit of projects that shoulder our students with frivolous costs threaten the UC’s crowning achievement in making quality higher education accessible to Californian’s of all financial backgrounds.

reflection questions:

1. Has cost-of-living ever impacted your quality of life? If so, how?
2. What should be the universities responsibility to provide affordable housing to students?
3. What responsibility does the UC and it’s employees have to our neighbors?

In the foreground, Anchor House. In the background, University Hall, slated to be demolished and replaced by the Bakar ClimatEngenuity Hub.





photo: UCB

announcing the 2024-2025 biosciences graduate gatherings.

by Maya Samuels Fair
PhD candidate

DEIB initiatives within our Biosciences departments can feel siloed, so a central goal of this DEI Newsletter has been to create communication amongst departments about ideas, resources, and events. Concurrent with the life of this newsletter, the iBio Conference has expanded to include IB, MCB, Neuro, Biophysics, and Computational Biology. In its third year, the 2024 iBio Conference brought together over a hundred members of these departments to discuss mentorship, power dynamics, career paths, and much more. Every year, attendees report leaving iBio with inspiration to implement changes in their labs and courses. However, there is a recognized need for more cross-department gatherings throughout the academic year to hold ourselves accountable and maintain community connections.

To that end, the Graduate Gatherings committee is organizing upcoming community building and professional development events for members of the Biosciences departments. This initiative was **piloted by MCB** over the previous year, and now the program is expanding to all departments invited to the iBio Conference. Pilot events included workshops on wellness and the social impacts of our science. This semester, the committee is planning a social gathering in late September and a workshop in October on imposter syndrome. If you have an idea for a future Graduate Gathering, email the Newsletter at dei.news.biology@berkeley.edu.

The growth of cross-department gatherings is due in large part to Aubrey Green, MCB's DEIB Program Manager. With over ten years of experience in DEIB program organization across professional sectors, Green has streamlined

faculty, staff, and student efforts. Green believes in supporting graduate student initiatives in a way that does not overburden students with additional service work, which has been key for making the iBio and Graduate Gathering

committees sustainable. If you would like to get involved in these committees, please reach out to Green at aubreygreen@berkeley.edu.

upcoming events + campus resources

- 1 Sept. —**A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration**, BAMPFA (free)
- 6 Sept.—**First Friday at the Gilman Wine Block**, 3.00-8.00pm Gilman District (free admission)
- 10 Sept.—**Poetic Tuesday with MOAD**, 12.30-1.30pm, Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco (free)
- 4 Oct-6Oct.—**Hardly Strictly Music Festival**, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco (free)
- 13 Oct.—**Sunday Streets Block Party**: South of Market, San Francisco (free)



photo: UCB

DEI Newsletter is always looking for writers, copy-editors and artists to bring you balanced perspectives on community in the Biological Sciences at Berkeley. Interested in working with us, or have a story or event you would like to see featured in upcoming newsletters? Email us at dei.news.biology@berkeley.edu.

Sabertoothed
Cat outside
McCone Hall.

Supervisors—please circulate this newsletter to lab members and staff who may not be on our listserv.