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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO GUARDIAN

Mutual Aid at UCSD

📅 June 12, 2020

👤 Lara Sanli



COVID-19 has further exposed and exacerbated structural inequalities. But instead of relying on uneven government relief efforts to improve things, people across the country are organizing mutual aid networks to lift each other up. Students at UC San Diego have taken on this responsibility of caring for each other and have organized their own mutual aid network to help UCSD community members seeking COVID relief.

Mutual Aid UCSD traces its beginnings back to winter quarter, when a group of UCSD graduate students first organized to provide a safety net for graduate students participating in the Cost of Living Adjustment movement. Once COVID-19 hit, Mutual Aid UCSD decided to maintain itself as an autonomous, student-run collective. It now organizes outside of COLA to provide basic needs for UCSD faculty, students, and staff disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

The term “mutual aid” refers to self-organized volunteer efforts to redistribute resources more equitably within a community. Mutual aid is distinct from charity; while charity is

vertical and flows from top to bottom, mutual aid is horizontal— it's symbiotic, self-organized, and focused on changing the structures that created inequality in the first place.

Mutual aid has historical roots as a grassroots organizing method during the '60s and '70s. Prominent examples can be seen in The Black Panther Party, which led a free-breakfast program for children in impoverished areas, and the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, led by transgender revolutionaries Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, to support homeless trans youth in New York. Mutual aid efforts are now resurfacing in the coronavirus era.

The philosophy of mutual aid holds that no struggle is completely independent or mutually exclusive from any other, and COVID-19 is interwoven with other social, political, and economic structural inequalities.

“COVID-19 affects certain people differently,” Eleanor Roosevelt College junior and Mutual Aid UCSD member Grayson Sims explained. “In particular, people of color, Black people, and Indigenous people. And so we want to stick together.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 has a disproportionately large impact on racial and ethnic minority groups. In addition, the university's transition to Zoom has made differences in privilege and circumstance even more apparent. For example, some students face unique obstacles in accessing computers and Wi-Fi. Other students are facing financial hardship and struggling to gain employment. Many students have moved back home, and some live in highly affected areas with unequal access to food, healthcare, and other resources. These CDC says these socioeconomic conditions are more common among racial and ethnic minority communities than among white communities.

Nearly all of the 14 Mutual Aid UCSD core organizers identify as Black, Indigenous, and POC students themselves. As members of underserved communities that already face unique challenges in navigating a historically white institution, Mutual Aid UCSD works to provide community support outside of the university, the collective told The UCSD Guardian.

Because mutual aid philosophy encourages existence independently of institutions, Mutual Aid UCSD has partnered with independent co-ops on campus to organize joint programming. For example, the Food Co-op has donated extra food to Mutual Aid UCSD. Mutual Aid UCSD is also collaborating with Groundworks Books to host reading groups

about social issues and build community about the philosophy of mutual aid.

Mutual Aid UCSD
@mutualaiducsd

The @ucsdfoodcoop has generously donated these bulk items to mutual aid! If you are in need of some of these items, please get in touch! And please support our student coops doing critical work to build collective governance and alternative economies! @groundworkbooks @thechecafe

Category	Item	Quantity
Dry Beans, Bulk	Black Beans	High
	Black Eyed Peas	Medium
	Fava Beans	High
	Mung Beans	High
	Orca Beans	Low
Dry Lentils, Bulk	Pinto Beans	High
	Green Lentils	High
Dry Starch, Bulk	Red Lentils	Medium
	Granola	High
	Rice, Brown	Medium
	Rice, White	Medium
	Instant Noodle	High
	Chia Seeds	High
	Earth Balance Vegan Butter	16 containers
	Milled Flax Seed	6 boxes
	Sugar, Brown	Medium
	Sugar, Raw	Low
	Sugar, White	Medium
Snacks	KIND Bars (NOT VEGAN)	9 (varied flavors)
Tea	Darjeeling	3 boxes
	English Breakfast	2 boxes
	Jasmine Green	4 boxes
	Mint Magic	4 boxes
	Oolong	2 boxes

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9 See Mutual Aid UCSD's other Tweets

Mutual Aid UCSD also organizes weekly social check-ins via Zoom to discuss social issues, mental health, and come together as a UCSD community. The social check-ins provide a safe space for UCSD community members to reflect on their positions in the world.

“I think the emphasis is on self care,” Sims said. “Especially amidst all of this ongoing police brutality going on. We do have discussions on it, specifically for people who just want a space to talk about it.”

By taking time to reflect and heal at these social check-ins, community members stand up for themselves and insist that they deserve support in a world historically structured against them. This revolutionary idea can be traced to the black lesbian activist Audre Lorde, who once said, of her in her fight for social justice, in the ‘80s, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” The practice of

self-care has historically served as a gesture of defiance against racist and oppressive systems, and Mutual Aid UCSD considers it a critical component of their activism. These social check-ins offer a space for emotional healing and education on allyship, especially for Black Lives Matter.

“We believe an important part of mutual aid, especially with the pandemic of police brutality, is to be allies, to use our privilege to call out anti-Blackness in our communities, and stand with the voices of Black people,” the collective said.

So far, Mutual Aid UCSD has collected \$4,903 in donations. It has disbursed \$2,550 to 20 different UCSD community members with financial needs, and is currently in the process of disbursing the rest. In addition, more than 80 volunteers have signed up to deliver food and supplies to those in need.

Those interested UCSD community members can get involved by donating, attending weekly social check-ins, and signing up to volunteer or organize. People can also sign up here to request aid. Mutual Aid UCSD’s list of Black Lives Matter resources can be accessed here.

For more information, visit @mutualaiducsd on Instagram/Twitter/Facebook.

Photo courtesy of Mutual Aid UCSD.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO GUARDIAN

Graduating Students Organize Petition for Regalia Refunds

📅 June 13, 2020

👤 Troy Tuquero



Graduating UC San Diego students have created a petition that asks for refunds for students whose graduation regalia arrived after the virtual commencement ceremony on Saturday, June 13. This comes after UCSD sent an email out to graduating students on May 14 claiming that Jostens, the memorabilia manufacturer contracted by the university to supply graduation regalia, would be able to fulfill student orders received by May 15 in time for the ceremony.

The Change.org petition begins by referencing how the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn has created barriers for the Class of 2020 to celebrate their college graduation.

“For many of us, the ability to wear our graduation regalia on our graduation day sitting in our living rooms on Zoom was something to look forward to,” the petition states. “Despite it all, at least we could take graduation pictures on our big day and try to make the occasion [meaningful] in a different way. Essentially, we were trying to make the best of what we had.”

The petition goes on to explain that the shipping delay has prevented students from doing that. The request concludes with a call to action from Jostens and UCSD to issue refunds to students.

Petition organizer and former Guardian Opinion Editor Geena Roberts said that while she hopes that Jostens would agree to at least a partial refund, it does not fix the fact that students were not able to properly celebrate their graduation.

“Many of us and our families are financially struggling because of the pandemic and yet still purchased [graduation regalia] because of the importance of wearing it on the day of [the graduation commencement],” Roberts said. “[Jostens] should have been much more transparent and [UCSD administration] should step in on behalf of graduates because they are the one that chose to contract with Jostens.”

Roberts said that she personally never received any notice from Jostens informing her that the graduation gear would be arriving late. She claimed that her UPS shipping portal was updated at 6 p.m. PST on June 12 to indicate that the graduation gear would not be arriving on that day and would now be arriving on Monday, June 15.

“A good friend of mine, who is [a first generation college student], and another friend of mine, [a resident’s assistant coworker], also both had this problem despite Jostens’s promises,” Roberts said. “I realized [that the delays were] a larger issue than just me and someone needed to do something.”

Jostens confirmed in an email on Thursday, June 11, that many students would not be receiving their shipments until after their graduation.

“On behalf of our Jostens team, I want to apologize for the delay in the arrival of your graduation regalia,” Jostens Sales Representative Sandra Ochoa wrote in the email. “Despite our best efforts during these challenging times, and faced with unforeseen shipping challenges, [the graduation] regalia was shipped with what [Jostens] thought was enough time to deliver by [Friday, June 12], yet it has come to our attention that it will not be arriving until early next week.”

Ochoa added that “no excuses or explanation could alleviate the disappointment [graduating students] must be feeling.” The email also notes that Jostens is working with university officials and the UCSD Bookstore to prioritize customer service and concludes

with an invitation for graduating students to contact Ochoa directly to resolve any issues that may arise.

In a separate email to Roberts, Ochoa apologized again for the delay in the shipment of the graduation regalia. She added that a message is being put together to inform graduates that Jostens intends to issue a full refund to those who ordered their regalia by the advertised May 15th deadline and did not receive it in time for the commencement ceremony.

UCSD's virtual commencement ceremony began at 9 a.m. PST on Saturday, June 13. At the time of publication, the refund petition has over 250 signatures.

This article was updated to reflect Jostens's plan to issue a full refund to graduating UCSD students whose graduation regalia did not arrive on time.

Photo courtesy of UC San Diego Commencement 2020.