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March 19, 2009

Dear Prospective and Current UCSB Students and Parents,

The federal Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is submitted annually by over 10 million students. Because its design does not allow families to report their unique circumstances, financial aid offices throughout the nation have always been empowered to make professional judgment decisions to address families' changing financial circumstances so that current financial information is used in the calculation of the Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

Responding to these changes has always been part of our role. We know that parents sometimes change and lose jobs and that earning capacities are diminished. Parents get married, and they get divorced. Medical emergencies drain families' savings. Unforeseen circumstances can place untold burdens on families' budgets. During our normal processing cycle, we have been able to accommodate requests from families to acknowledge these changes. However, responding under such dire conditions as those presented by our state's current economy poses an unprecedented challenge to our staff and a tremendous demand for the finite funds we administer.

## Unofficial Award Letter & Review of Special Circumstances

The estimated aid eligibility displayed on UCSB's admitted students' Unofficial Award Letters (UAL) will be based on the most recent data contained on the FAFSA at the time the unofficial aid eligibility is determined.

- While it is expected that approximately 4,000 new freshmen will decide to attend UCSB, over 21,000 students were admitted. Approximately 17,000 of the admitted students submitted 2009-10 FAFSAs to UCSB and will receive UALs.
- Because of this very large applicant population, we are not able to respond to families' requests to recalculate their EFCs based on their special circumstances and current financial data and to provide revised UAL aid eligibility that reflects these changes.

We regret having to take this position, and we appreciate your understanding of this decision.

**OPTION:** All of the University of California campuses have "Financial Aid Estimators" on their Financial Aid Offices' websites. These tools were created to give prospective students an estimated range of gift and self-help aid eligibility for college planning purposes. We invite you to use this self-service tool. While it is not a perfect proxy for a 2009-10 EFC recalculation done by one of our staff, it will give you a fairly accurate estimate based on the figures you provide. Simply use your projected 2009 income information. The "number in family household" and "number of family members in college" questions should be answered with respect to 2009-10. Please keep in mind that the formulas and allowances currently in the calculator are for 2008-09; thus, the resulting aid eligibility will be slightly lower than that which the 2009-10 formulas would produce.

## The Request for Review Process

Every year, we receive numerous requests from parents requesting a review of their students' financial aid eligibility based on their unique circumstances. Many families acknowledge having significant earnings but also report having a life style (huge mortgage payments, private school tuition, etc.) that strains their budgets. Other families report tragic life experiences such as loss of a job, death of a parent, and other negative impacts on their lives and their income streams. In most cases, the letters we receive do not have sufficient information on which we can base our recalculation of EFC levels and aid eligibility amounts. As a result, we designed a "*Request for Review*" (RFR) form and established a procedure that allows us to not only acknowledge these circumstances but also allows us to review and process, in the same, very condensed timeframe, the verification documents (tax returns, etc.) we request from over 8,000 students.

- The RFR form defines the conditions (e.g., loss of income, death of a parent after the FAFSA was submitted, etc.) we will consider for review, and it describes the type of documentation we'll need.
- As a matter of institutional policy, with the exception of extraordinary, on-going medical expenses, we do not adjust parental income on the basis of extraordinary expenses (i.e., expenses exceeding income). We acknowledge that families may be locked into large mortgage payments and other life style expenses; however, adjusting for families' expenses is not part of our university policies for determining aid eligibility.

**When is the RFR Form Available?** We will release the 2009-2010 RFR form on our website in mid-May.

**When will RFRs be reviewed and processed?** Because we will give processing priority to evaluating the tremendous volume of verification documents we will require, we anticipate we will begin reviewing RFRs in July; however, our workload may force this RFR review process into later in the summer. Using bulletins on our website, we will keep you informed and updated of any changes to that plan.

## Anticipated Unprecedented Demand for Funds

I would be remiss if I did not add a cautionary note about fund availability. While eligibility for Pell Grants, Cal Grants, and Subsidized Direct Loans is theoretically limitless and all students will receive the amounts for which they qualify, most of the remaining federal and university fund sources that we administer are finite. In prior years, we have been able to provide additional university grant funds to those on-time aid applicants that qualify after the RFR changes were reviewed and EFCs were recalculated. However, because of the uncertainty surrounding the number and anticipated magnitude of the 2009-2010 Requests for Review, we are not certain that we will have sufficient university grant funding for all of the revised need determined by the Request for Review process. We will monitor our fund balances very closely throughout the summer and early fall, and we will make every effort to accommodate the funding needs of our aid application population.

Once again, we regret not having the staff and resources to review shortfalls in your financial resources within a timeframe that accommodates new students' need for this information prior to making college choice decisions. We thank you for your understanding and patience.

Sincerely

Ron Andrade  
Director of Financial Aid