



Council Resolution 12 (CR12) Literature Building Apparent Cancer Cluster Petition Resolution



WHEREAS the Literature Department has a history of health issues in the Literature Building^{1,2};

WHEREAS on May 22nd, 2016, UC San Diego Literature Department graduate students released a collectively written statement/petition regarding the public safety risks in the Literature building after the eleventh case of breast cancer since 2000 was diagnosed³;

WHEREAS on May 27th, 2016, UCSD Literature faculty wrote a letter to Dean Cristina Della Coletta in response to, and in support of, the graduate students' collective statement and additionally requested the letter and report to be sent to UCSD Administration⁴;

WHEREAS the Literature Department concerns are transparency of the building's health risks and acknowledgement of the risks by UCSD administration;

WHEREAS the Literature Department protested the lack of response from the University administration in 2009, as reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, and the department is willing to protest again if the University does not currently address the concerns raised⁵;

WHEREAS lack of communication and transparency about the health risks of the Literature building intimately affects graduate and undergraduate students, faculty, and staff;

BE IT RESOLVED that GSAUCSD supports the concerns expressed in this statement/petition by our colleagues in the Literature Department;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that GSAUCSD requests that major communications made between university administration and the Literature Department regarding this issue be made publicly available;

¹Literature Building Committee. "Literature Building Committee Final Report." *Doc.google.com*. Web. [Lit. Building Committee Final Report](#)

²Dr. Cedric Garland. *blink.ucsd.edu*. Web. [Garland Report](#).

³See 2 versions: Literature Grads [Department of Literature]. "Collective Statement on the Literature Building Cancer Cluster." *Doc.google.com*. 22 May 2016. Web. [Collective Statement on Literature Building Cancer Cluster](#); and Literature Grads [Department of Literature]. "Collective Statement on the Literature Building Cancer Cluster" *Change.org*. 22 May 2016. Web. [Petition UCSD: The Literature Building](#)

⁴Yingjin Zhang. "Literature Department Letter to Dean of Arts and Humanities." [Lit Depart Memo](#).

⁵Tara Parker-Hope. "Campus Building Blamed for Cancer Cluster." *Well.blogs.nytimes.com*. Well, 24 FEB. 2009. Web. 22 May 2009. [Campus Building Blamed for Cancer Cluster](#)



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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that GSAUCSD requests to be CC'd to the response given by Dean Della Colleta's and the UCSD Administration to the 5/27/2016 memo delivered to them by the Literature Department;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this message be delivered by the GSAUCSD Presidency directly to the Dean of Arts and Humanities, the Dean of Graduate Division, the UCSD Academic Senate, and the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that GSAUCSD supports the consideration to provide temporary space to the faculty of the Literature department, that university administration re-conduct a study on the condition of the building and the presence of carcinogenic factors, and that information about apparent cancer clusters on campus be made publicly available to prospective and current students, faculty, and staff.

Voted and Passed in GSA Council Meeting #15: 5/31/16 (Y/N/A - 24/1/4)

Certified: Lindsay M. Freeman, 6/1/16

Addendum

We, the undersigned graduate students from the UCSD Literature Department and their allies, are writing to publicly voice our concerns about the building where the Literature program is currently housed. In the past twenty-six years, many members of our departmental community have been diagnosed with cancer, forming an as-yet unexplained cancer cluster centered on the Literature Building.

Recently, one graduate student, 34, informed us of her breast cancer diagnosis. This brings the number to eleven women and non-binary colleagues in the Literature Department since 2000 to be afflicted with this cancer. A faculty member recently informed us of his cancer diagnosis as well. Several other members of our community who worked in the building have been diagnosed with various forms of cancer, including ovarian, adrenal and salivary gland cancers; at least three others have faced large benign tumors, calcifications and fibrosis which impacted their mobility or otherwise demanded treatment. Three have passed away. According to the data noted in the [Garland Report](#), a study conducted in 2008 by an epidemiologist, the median age of those affected is younger than the median age of diagnosis for breast cancer in the U.S. population, and the Department had an observed incidence of breast cancer "about 4-5



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times the expected incidence in the California general population.” In addition, many of the breast cancers have been quick-spreading or aggressive, with two of the breast cancers diagnosed as a particularly rare and deadly form, inflammatory breast cancer, and others metastatic and/or invasive. Though all who were afflicted go unnamed here, we wish to acknowledge that they were and *are* our co-workers, mentors, and above all, our allies and family. We keep them all in our thoughts and memory and write collectively now against succumbing to a purposeful forgetting, acknowledging that the cancer cluster is not a "closed" matter, but a present reality.

We write this letter now to affect physical and structural change, to affirm our sense of community, and to finally eliminate the constant worry and fear that haunts us all. Our building’s cancerous history remains a continuous presence in our lives, but we stand united in the hope of building a better future. Our departmental community calls on the university administration to stand with us as we seek to overcome the structural and physical challenges that impede our efforts to teach, learn and collaborate. We acknowledge all the hard work that has been done by faculty, staff and graduate students to address the building health concerns in the past, particularly the [Building Committee](#)'s efforts. In response to the higher incidence of breast cancer in the building the administration sponsored studies in 2009 and 2010 to research and address the possible material causes of the cancer. Though the 2010 study, conducted by the contractor Field Management Services Corp, concluded that the AC magnetic field measurements of the ground floor of the Literature Building were only “modestly” higher than the surrounding area, new cases of cancer have continued to be diagnosed.

Though many necessary fixes have been made, there is still a real concern that we wish to acknowledge: Many of us continue to feel the very real psychological effects left behind by the cancer cluster, and these immeasurable mental and emotional fallout, as well as the still unknown physical effects, cannot be brushed aside. The psychological impact has not been addressed by the administration; perhaps part of the reason for this, is that we have not fully articulated those concerns. We wish to articulate them here:

The building is marred. It holds a cancerous history that continues to undermine our work as students, educators and community members, despite pages upon pages of scientific proof that our bodies are no longer in danger. This history has changed the building and fractured our community. We cannot walk the hallways without thinking of



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lost friends and mentors. We cannot be fully present in seminars or office hours without thinking about the dangers we might be exposed to on daily basis. Many of us just stay away from the building.

We live with this cancerous history, and we've been made to keep silent. We cannot remain silent, not anymore.

We no longer want to be in the building. We no longer want anyone to be housed there. As long as we remain there, our work and livelihood will continue to be affected. The physical space will continue to be oppressive. We will always feel a weight when stepping into our classrooms or office hours. We will always feel a weight when stepping into the elevator. The weight we feel is not imagined. It is real. We feel the weight of our lost loved ones and mentors. We feel the weight of those who are still sick and who might get sick in the days to come.

We ask all those who read this: Would you return to a building where more than twelve members of your community were afflicted with cancer? Where three members of your community contracted a cancer that killed them? Would you be able to go back to business as usual? Would your community ever be the same? Would your mind, charged with the task of doing serious intellectual work, ever be free to think without the memory of cancer?

With those questions in your mind, we ask that the administration consider and respond to the following:

As graduate students, we no longer want to be housed in this building. We want our whole department – faculty, staff, and graduate students – to be moved to another location where we can start to rebuild our community anew, free of the weight of cancerous memories.

We have heard that there are plans to move the Department in several years. How many people could get sick in that time? Who will inherit the space? What will happen to the water, the earth below it? We ask that information about the plans for the Departmental move be made publicly available and transparent, including the history of the cancer cluster, the



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work that has been done, new cases and what the plans are for the building and site after the move.

An additional study and reinvestigation of the building which would include testing for levels of PCBs and endocrine disruptors.

An additional public meeting at a time accessible to all workers in the building (**not** 9 am on a Monday) to address these issues with UCSD administration before the end of Spring quarter 2016, and before work begins on the Literature Building's elevator and the ventilation area (both named as potentially toxic in the initial report) in [August 2016](#).

Information and records on the cancer cluster incorporated into Safety training and made accessible to all incoming and presently-enrolled students, faculty, staff, and maintenance personnel. We also ask that these records be made available to Campus Health Services and UCSD Medical Center's/Moore Cancer Center's systems.

Permanent graduate and faculty lounges housed outside the department.

Two to three offices where Literature faculty can hold office hours outside the department.

When we came to UCSD, we moved away from our friends, families, and loved ones. We hoped to find a new home in the department. We found a community haunted by a painful past. Now, we write in the hope that we can build a new departmental home. We voice our concerns not to downplay the very real physical effects our friends, colleagues, and mentors feel, *but to do them honor*. As graduate students and their allies who sign in solidarity with those who feel the measurable and immeasurable effects of the high rates of cancer in the Literature Building, we affix our names to this document.

Department of Literature

Jeanine Webb, Doctoral Candidate, Departmental Dissertation Fellow, Cancer Patient

Niall Twohig, Doctoral Candidate

Luis Martin-Cabrera, Associate Professor of Peninsular and Latin American Literature and Culture

Page DuBois, Distinguished Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature, breast cancer survivor

Zachary Hayes, Doctoral Candidate



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