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UC-Santa Cruz student walkout still going strong

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Students at the University of California, Santa Cruz stayed away from class again Tuesday by the thousands in solidarity with graduate teaching assistants who have staged a walkout over the university's statewide refusal to recognize their union.

UC-Santa Cruz officials did not provide attendance estimates. On Monday, however, administrators estimated that 50 percent to 70 percent of classes were empty or held off campus.

Tuesday, ridership on UC-Santa Cruz shuttle buses was down two-thirds, UC spokesman Jim Burns said. "It normally is quiet the week before Thanksgiving, but not this quiet," he said. "There didn't appear to be as many students on campus as yesterday."

Students with picket signs and bullhorns gathered at both entrances to campus Tuesday. Perhaps the largest gathering came when several hundred undergraduates met near UC-Santa Cruz's main entrance for a transplanted mass media class taught by Santa Cruz City Councilman Mike Rotkin.

The Graduate Student Employees Association, which has aligned itself with the United Auto Workers in an attempt to gain collective bargaining for graduate student teaching assistants, estimated 70 percent of classes at UC-Santa Cruz did not meet on campus.

The graduate students are not asking for higher wages or fewer working hours. Rather, they want a contract to provide job security during upcoming rounds of state budget cuts and fee increases. The UC system has argued that state law forbids such a contract.

"We have the overwhelming support of the campus and local community," walkout spokesman Will Hull said. "It's ludicrous that the office of the president will not allow individual campus administrations the autonomy to come to an amicable settlement with their employees."

Tuesday at UC-Berkeley, the Academic Senate approved a resolution urging a settlement of the 4-day-old strike at that campus. But it stopped short of supporting the students' demand for collective bargaining.

"All the union cares about is bread and butter," not academic issues, said Professor Emeritus Angus Taylor, a former UC-Santa Cruz chancellor. "If you approve this, you may be opening up problems for other campuses."