

Over the course of the last 24 hours I have received numerous disturbing messages from students who described their experience and feelings during, and in the wake of, an ASUC meeting held on Monday night. These messages came from Black students, Jewish students, Muslim students...students from the full range of political perspectives and identity groups...students with antithetical views regarding the conflict in the Middle East. While these messages could not have been more different in terms of the sender's identity, they all had one thing in common: Each message described what were perceived to be harmful verbal assaults and actions that left the student feeling unsafe, and concerned that they are not being seen or heard.

I want to assure you that I have heard the diverse voices expressing anger, fear, and hurt. However, I am not able to adjudicate what happened on Monday, and nor am I interested in blame. I know enough about what happened on Monday to feel a real sense of urgency, not just because of what happened this week, but also in the wake of other divisive incidents on our campus that have left students feeling fearful and disregarded. What I am interested in, and committed to is finding ways to build, not damage and destroy, the ties that can and should bind us together as a campus community and create a true sense of belonging for all.

Before I describe how my administration is responding I want to clearly reiterate our values. We condemn and find intolerable expressions of bias and discrimination. We condemn and find intolerable expressions of racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, Islamophobia, misogyny, anti-Blackness, xenophobia, and every other form of hatred that is based on an individual's origins, identity, or political viewpoint. We believe deeply in the importance of, and necessity for respectful debate. At the heart of all that we aspire to be as a community are our Principles of Community which, if we abide by them, help support our belief that differences of opinion need not lead to divides, and that our heterogeneous community can thrive without homogeneity of belief and perspective. If you are not familiar with the Principles, I urge you to read them.

At the center of Monday's meeting is a difficult challenge that we must acknowledge and continue to confront—the tension between Free Speech and our commitment to creating a campus environment where everyone must feel safe, respected, and welcome. Students who support the Palestinian cause have a right to celebrate those they see as fighters for that cause, and their rights to express that support are fully protected by our country's constitution. By the same token, Jewish students have a right to feel dismay and concern after seeing a poster they perceive as honoring those who killed, or attempted to kill, unarmed Jewish civilians. Each side has an equal right to express and have heard their perspective.

Senior leaders in my administration, from the Office of the Chancellor, Student Affairs, and Equity and Inclusion, are now deeply involved in efforts to de-escalate, explore avenues for possible dialogue, and ensure all involved are heard, understood and provided with the support they may need. They are reaching out to impacted students and leaders from every corner of our community to discuss opportunities for expression

and engagement. Administrators are also consulting with the campus' Restorative Justice Center to explore additional avenues for engagement and de-escalation. We also want to support the ASUC, and provide it with assistance and support so it can preserve its place as a safe venue for respectful deliberation of issues that are important to students.

I appreciate the passion, activism, and commitment of our students. I also deeply value and believe in the educational, personal, and societal benefits of a strong supportive community that can accommodate differences and still be welcoming for all. I understand these are complicated, difficult issues but we cannot let that complexity deter our efforts to create a sense of belonging for all.

Sincerely,

Carol Christ
Chancellor
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