

Dear Colleagues,

We are writing to voice our deep concern over the recent events at USC and on campuses across the country. The ideas expressed in this letter are our personal views, and we are not speaking on behalf of USC.

Throughout history, college student protests have been at the center of social movements that have challenged institutions of higher education to revise their policies and practices to advance equity for communities that have been marginalized and oppressed. From the Greensboro sit-ins and Vietnam War protests in the 1960s to the apartheid divestment movement in the 1990s to the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020, student protests have played a vital role in transforming our campuses and society at large.

The recent events at USC regarding the University's decisions to cancel Asna Tabassum as the valedictorian speaker and the main graduation ceremony, have us deeply troubled. We condemn the use of police force as a strategy to silence students, faculty, staff, and community members on college campuses across the country. We are also disappointed in the lack of shared governance; USC has a history of repeatedly leaving out faculty, staff and students from important decisions. As a group of faculty who are mentoring and teaching the next generation of higher education administrators and scholars, we are deeply saddened by the inability of many institutions of higher education across the United States to prioritize and maintain their commitments to student well-being, learning, and growth as students and community members exercise their right to protest.

As faculty members, we commit to using our platforms and resources to advocate and care for members of the USC community as they exercise their right to protest. **We strongly urge USC leadership to reconsider canceling the main graduation ceremony and to reinstate Asna Tabassum as the valedictorian speaker.**

Additionally, we are calling for USC and universities across the country to ensure that they center their commitments to care for students, academic freedom, and shared governance as they engage faculty, staff, and community members. Ensuring our campuses are spaces for students to learn and thrive is a shared responsibility that we take seriously, and we commit to working together with students, faculty, and community members to ensure students feel protected in enacting their right to peaceful protest and questioning campus decision-making.

As faculty and staff whose work is dedicated to the creation and implementation of policies and practices that promote equity and the well-being of students, faculty, and staff — in particular those from historically and currently marginalized backgrounds — we, like many of our colleagues in higher education, are grappling with the following questions:

- How do we support academic freedom for all members of our community?
- How do we as a community provide space for conflicting views on complex issues?
- How can we bring students and faculty into discussions about campus decisions on areas like commencement speakers and investment/divestment?
- What values do our actions reflect? How do our decisions at this moment center our commitments to student learning, growth, and development?

As we engage around these questions, we are indebted to colleagues in the higher education community whose works are helping us figure out how to center our commitments to equity, well-being, and student development. We share these resources with the hope that they might be helpful to members of the Rossier School of Education, USC, and the higher education community more broadly.

- Shafiqah Ahmadi and Darnell Cole's book [*Islamophobia in Higher Education: Combating Discrimination and Creating Understanding*](#)
- Eddie Cole's book on Presidential leadership during the civil rights movement [*The Campus Color Line: College Presidents and the Struggle for Black Freedom*](#)
- Jude Dizon and Charles Davis III's [*Campus Policing: Eight Steps Toward Abolition*](#)
- Liliana M. Garces, Brianna Davis Johnson, Evelyn Ambriz, and Dwuana Bradley's piece [*Repressive Legalism: How Postsecondary Administrators' Responses to On-Campus Hate Speech Undermine a Focus on Inclusion*](#)
- Adrianna Kezar, Sharon Fries-Britt, Elizabeth Kurban, Donté McGuire, Marissiko Wheaton and Jude Paul Matias Dizon's ACE reports, [*Speaking Truth and Acting with Integrity: Confronting Challenges of Campus Racial Climate*](#) and [*Leading After a Racial Crisis: Weaving a Campus Tapestry of Diversity and Inclusion*](#)
- Chris Linder, Stephen John Quaye, Alex C. Lange, Ricky Ericka Roberts, Marvette C. Lacy and Wilson Kwyamosi Okello's piece [*"A Student Should Have the Privilege of Just Being a Student": Student Activism as Labor.*](#)
- Bill Tierney's work on academic freedom: [*Higher education for democracy: The role of the university in civil society*](#) and [*Get real: 49 challenges confronting higher education.*](#)

With deep appreciation for students and colleagues who are working toward a more just world,

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