

Open Letter to Chancellors and Presidents of American Universities and Colleges From Your Faculty

We have witnessed, over the past two months, police departments using significant amounts of force against individuals peacefully participating in the Occupy movement. But during the week of November 13 – November 19, there was an astonishing escalation of the violence used by municipal police departments against non-violent protesters.

We hoped that even as politicians and municipal police violently responded to the Occupy movement, college and university campuses would remain safe locations for non-violent political dissent. But that has not been the case. In fact, universities and colleges appear to be using the same tactics in their interactions with unarmed, non-violent members of the university community as we have seen municipal police use against the broader Occupy movement.

In particular, we are concerned with the actions by police associated with two University of California campuses. At UC Berkeley, police beat faculty and students who were peacefully attempting to establish an Occupy camp on Sproul Plaza. At UC Davis, police casually pepper sprayed protesting students who were peacefully sitting with their arms linked. The message sent by university officials is clear: if you engage in non-violent political protest on the university campus, you run the risk of being assaulted by university police.

We condemn this and any deployment of violence by university officials against members of the university community who are non-violently expressing their political views.

We condemn university officials using violence or the threat of violence in order to limit political dissent to the narrow confines of print and university-sanctioned events.

We condemn university officials using violence and the threat of violence to prevent members of the university community from peacefully assembling.

For more than three generations, American university and college campuses have been crucial locations in which inspiring and important political activity has occurred. From the founding of SNCC at Shaw University and the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in the 1960's, to the divestment movements across American college campuses in the 1980s, to the establishment of student labor alliances in the 1990's, American college campuses have pulsed with hopeful and positive forms of dissent and visions of alternatives. This admirable tradition is being threatened by the use of violence by university officials against their own students and faculty who are acting within this tradition.

We therefore call on chancellors and presidents of universities and colleges throughout the United States to declare publicly that their campuses are *Safe Protest Zones*, where non-violent, public political dissent and protest will be protected by university police and will never be attacked by the university police.

We call on these chancellors and presidents to commit publicly to making their campuses safe locations for peaceful public assembly.

We call on these chancellors and presidents to institute immediately policies that reflect these commitments, and to instruct their police and security forces that they must abide by these policies.

We believe that this action is necessary for the protection of one of the principal virtues of our higher education system, namely that it is an environment that cultivates an active and engaged political imagination. We call on the leaders of America's universities and colleges to stand with us.