

An Open Letter to the Campus Community

Subject: An Open Letter to the Campus Community
 From: "Gibor Basri, Vice Chancellor—Equity & Inclusion (Campus-wide)"
 <CALmessages@berkeley.edu>
 Date: Mon., November 17, 2008, 6:55 pm
 To: "Students" <CALmessages@berkeley.edu>

Recent events both on and off campus have prompted us to send this open letter to the campus community. In order for all of us to thrive and succeed, our campus must be safe and welcoming, and disagreements need to be managed in a respectful and civil manner. At Berkeley, we are passionate about the matters that shape our world; debate, free speech, and political activism are proudly defining characteristics of our campus. But we must also ensure that debates and advocacy take place in a reasoned and civil way that increases understanding and does not promote intolerance and hate.

Unfortunately, there have been a number of troubling incidents that make us acutely aware of the need for continued vigilance, constructive dialogue and concerted action to protect these values. In addition, we believe that it is essential for every member of the campus community to be aware of the venues and vehicles that are available for dialogue, conflict resolution and the reporting of incidents, including acts of retaliation, that appear to violate our principles, values, and standards of conduct.

Most recently a dispute between students with differing views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict led to a physical altercation and citations issued by the police. Physical assault and violence are never acceptable. We as a campus will not tolerate such incidents and reiterate our condemnation of them. Other disturbing and unacceptable incidents this semester have included hate graffiti, racially derogatory remarks directed at specific students, and potentially criminal acts of retribution. The cumulative impact of these incidents has left many on campus feeling uncertain about how,

LETTER

Gibor Basri is the founding Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion at the University of California, Berkeley, where he is also professor of astronomy. He has published widely on star formation and other topics in astronomy. After a series of events on and near the UC Berkeley campus, he sent this e-mail message to students, faculty, and staff. The e-mail was signed by Basri, as well as Chancellor Robert Birgeneau, Associated Students of the University of California President Roxanne Winston, and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Harry Le Grande. These days, there is much in the news about how political discussions, even on a college campus, are less civil; people want to shout at one another, rather than to discuss issues calmly. What is the "discussion climate" on your campus or in your community?



exactly, the campus is responding and disappointed in the behavior of a few students who have been provocative or tried to take matters in their own hands. It is expected that students themselves will take leadership and responsibility for upholding campus values.

We are taking vigorous steps to address the current situation. University administration and student leaders are working to make sure that all voices are being heard and tensions are lessened. The UC Police Department is continuing to investigate the recent altercation, graffiti, and other matters. Campus groups are holding activities such as forums, town halls, and other forms of civil dialogue between people with differences including this week's Peace Not Prejudice events (www.calpnp.com).

The values of civility and tolerance require constant attention, thought, and action. To help promote them, in 2005 the University adopted Principles of Community (berkeley.edu/about/principles.shtml) which include the expectations we hold for respectful behavior from all members of the campus community. In addition, the campus has a number of resources which provide proper channels to deal with provocations which violate our values. You can turn to any of these offices: ASUC Student Advocate, the Office of Campus Climate and Compliance, Office of the Dean of Students, the Gender Equity Resource Center, the Center for Student Conduct and Community Standards, staff in the Office of Multicultural Student Development, the UC Police Department, and the staff and student ombuds offices.

Developing a long-term strategy for improving campus climate is part of the charge of the new division of Equity & Inclusion, under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Gibor Basri. The division is developing further policies and practices which will help promote an inclusive and welcoming climate. One of these will be a Campus Climate Team that will help monitor and rapidly respond to future incidents. We will be updating and expanding the campus website for reporting bias related incidents (stop hate.berkeley.edu) and using technology to build an on-line community of those who want to make Berkeley safer and more inclusive. We are actively soliciting suggestions from students, student groups, staff, and faculty on ways to make UC Berkeley more civil and respectful of differences. We will be reporting regularly on the progress of these activities.

Students, faculty, and staff can also help by practicing civility with all members of our community and working to promote understanding and acceptance. We encourage everyone to participate in the debates and discussions that have made Berkeley famous throughout the world and to do so in the spirit of intellectual engagement, rational argumentation, respectful discourse, and regard for the common good. The vibrancy of Berkeley's intellectual environment is made possible by our rich diversity.

Let us use this opportunity to help lead the way away from bigotry and hate towards a flourishing, multicultural society.

(signed: Chancellor Robert Birgeneau, ASUC President Roxanne Winston, Vice Chancellor Gibor Basri, Vice Chancellor Harry Le Grande)

QUESTIONS FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION: LEARNING OUTCOMES

Rhetorical Knowledge: The Writers' Situation and Rhetoric

1. **Audience:** How is the e-mail message tailored to the audience—faculty, staff, and students at the University of California, Berkeley?
2. **Purpose:** What solutions are the authors of the letter proposing?
3. **Voice and tone:** How does the open letter model the kinds of respect that the authors are requesting?
4. **Responsibility:** Why do the authors include off-campus incidents in the letter?
5. **Context, format, and genre:** Why did the authors choose to send this message via e-mail? What other media might also be effective? Although the authors label the e-mail message an open letter, e-mails have some of the features of memos. What are some of those features?

Critical Thinking: The Writer's Ideas and Your Personal Response

6. If you were a student at Berkeley, how would you respond to this message?

7. If you found yourself in one of the situations described in the message, how would you respond at that moment?

Composing Processes and Knowledge of Conventions: The Writer's Choices

8. Why did these four individuals write this letter? Why did Basri not send it with his signature?
9. How do the signatories establish their collective *ethos* in the letter?

Inquiry and Research: Ideas for Further Exploration

10. Conduct a Web search to find out what kinds of problems colleges and universities have faced in the past.