

**Letter from Y & S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies Regarding SJP Campaign to
Stigmatize Educational Trips to Israel Sponsored by Certain Jewish Organizations
May 19, 2014**

Dear Supporters of the UCLA Y & S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies,

A number of you have expressed concern about recent developments among students on our campus, particularly efforts by some student groups to stigmatize educational trips to Israel sponsored by certain Jewish organizations and to disenfranchise student board members of the Undergraduate Students Association Council who have gone on such trips. Our Center is an educational and research institution dedicated to the study of Israel as a modern Jewish and democratic state. As such, we view any effort to prevent UCLA students from learning about Israel as contrary to our central mission.

Accordingly, we have carefully monitored the developments on our campus and given our support to student leaders who are working vigorously to oppose these discriminatory and unwarranted actions which threaten the educational environment on campus. Our Center will also continue to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and civil dialogue about Israel on campus, as well as to encourage and lend support to UCLA students to travel to Israel and to learn about the country, from whatever source, without stigma and intimidation.

I also applaud the statements made by University of California President Janet Napolitano and UCLA Chancellor Gene Block, which both recognize the centrality of freedom of speech on campus and sharply criticize efforts by some campus groups to delegitimize the educational trips. I thank President Napolitano and Chancellor Block for their leadership on this issue. For your information, I copy their respective statements below my signature.

Sincerely,

Neil W. Netanel

Interim Director, Y & S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies
Pete Kameron Professor of Law
UCLA School of Law

President Napolitano's statement on civil discourse at UCLA
UC Office of the President
Friday, May 16, 2014

UC President Janet Napolitano made the following statement today (May 16) following UCLA Chancellor Gene Block's message about the importance of civil discourse:

"I share Chancellor Block's concerns about students at UCLA who target any student seeking to participate in student government who has a relationship with, or wants to travel to, Israel on trips sponsored by certain groups. At the University of California, freedom of speech is a highly

valued principle. Yet, other principles are also highly valued, including the principles of civility, respect, and inclusion, and should also govern our campuses. The actions of these students at UCLA violate these principles.

“I encourage members of the university community, at both UCLA and at the other nine campuses at this great education institution, to come together, in open dialogue, to discuss the great issues of our day, learn from each other, and work to move our society forward. Harmful, hurtful speech by some hurts us all. We must work to ‘heed the better angels of our nature,’ as Abraham Lincoln said. That is what the University of California really stands for.”

Office of the Chancellor

To the Campus Community:

Over the past week, many of our students, as well as friends off campus, have communicated their concerns over a pledge that candidates for our student government were asked to sign prior to last week’s elections. Heated exchanges have occurred over the issue and have unfortunately left some feeling disrespected or targeted because of their views or affiliations. Certain news reports and other communications through social media have also mischaracterized aspects of the situation, fueling an unhealthy discourse that is harmful to our campus climate. Robust debate is vital to democratic learning, but it can never exclude common sense, civility and tolerance for those who disagree.

First, let me set the record straight on the facts, as we understand them: Students active in student government, who have varying views on Israel–Palestine issues, have participated in the recent past in free trips to the Middle East organized by Jewish groups. Prior to the recent student elections, some student groups asked candidates to sign a pledge promising not to go on such trips. The pledge was not sanctioned, proposed or required by our current student government or the university administration. No one was barred from running for office, participating in the election or serving on the council as a result of not signing the pledge. Some students signed, others did not. Both signatories and non-signatories won offices. The decision to circulate this pledge and the choice to sign it or not fall squarely within the realm of free speech, and free speech is sacrosanct to any university campus.

Second, just because speech is constitutionally protected doesn’t mean that it is wise, fair or productive. I am troubled that the pledge sought to delegitimize educational trips offered by some organizations but not others. I am troubled that the pledge can reasonably be seen as trying to eliminate selected viewpoints from the discussion. I condemn any remarks on social media or elsewhere that are disrespectful or hurtful.

Political speech that stigmatizes or casts aspersions on individuals or particular groups does not promote healthy debate but debases it by trying to intimidate individuals and

groups. It does not strengthen the bonds of mutual respect and engagement that sustain a diverse community able to manage differences; it weakens them. If we shut out perspectives, if we silence voices, if we allow innuendo to substitute for reasoned exchange of ideas, if we listen only to those who already share our assumptions, truth gets lost, our intellectual climate is impoverished and our community is diminished.

Passionate debate is to be expected in a civil society, especially in a heated election season, but I am personally concerned any time people feel disrespected, intimidated or unfairly singled out because of their beliefs. Important issues will generate passions, even discomfort — that cannot be avoided. But if the political debate on campus gets more shrill and less nuanced, if hostility replaces empathy, if we see each other as enemies rather than as colleagues trying to figure out how to do the right thing in difficult circumstances, we will all be the lesser for it. It is possible to express strong opinions without belittling others.

Today I am calling on our Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs to explore how to better foster political dialogue that is respectful, productive and focused on understanding rather than division. UCLA faculty, students and staff deserve an open environment that encourages vigorous debate without disparagement.

Sincerely,
Gene D. Block
Chancellor