



OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR
STUDENT AFFAIRS
2127 MURPHY HALL
BOX 951405
LOS ANGELES, CA 90095-1405

Dear Ms. Benjamin,

Chancellor Block asked me to respond to your letter. We appreciate hearing your concerns regarding the activities of our students as we believe that input from the public is crucial to helping us remain connected to the greater UCLA community.

I want to make clear that this pledge originated with individual students, and is not endorsed or enforced by the administration. The decision to sign this pledge falls squarely within the realm of free speech and free speech is essential to any university campus, even when those of us in leadership may strongly disagree. The specific issue addressed in the pledge involved a perceived conflict of interest on the part of a few students in this year's government who accepted subsidized trips to Israel that allegedly biased them in the discussion and vote on a failed divestment resolution in the undergraduate student council. Some candidates for office in the elections for next year's council opted to pledge that they would not accept such gifts that might create a perception of undue influence. Again, 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 debate or serving on the council as a result of not signing the pledge. Some students signed, others did not. The pledge did not appear to impact the election, as both signatories and non-signatories won offices.

We understand that a public statement targeting any specific group may raise concerns, and we fully endorse the importance of expressing those concerns. However the University should not interfere with our students' First Amendment rights and we must recognize the educational value of full debate over differing points of view—even when that debate may be difficult. In instances where debate goes beyond the bounds of civil discourse, we will, of course, respond as appropriate. And while the administration cannot and should not control the content or strategy in student government issues, we know such issues are emotionally charged and may cause strong disagreements on campus as much as they do in the larger community. We cannot insulate students from these difficult controversies, but we have and will continue to urge all members of our community to ensure their discussions remain informed, respectful, productive and focused on understanding rather than division. We also expect all students to abide by the university student code of conduct. Any student who feels mistreated or that his or her rights have been violated is encouraged to report that behavior to the Dean of Students who will fully investigate and, if appropriate, refer the matter to the proper student judicial process or university police, if necessary.

Again, thank you so much for bringing your concerns to our attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janina Montero". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke.

Janina Montero
Vice Chancellor – Student Affairs