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To the UC Regents Working Group Forum on Principles Against Intolerance

My name is Matt Malkan, now in my 31st year at UCLA in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. I have served on many campus-wide governance committees, including Privilege and Tenure, and Undergraduate Admissions for the College of Letters and Sciences, of which I was Chair.

My view is simple:

The Regents should not adopt a policy which limits speech by anyone at the University of California. This includes restricting statements that might be considered "intolerant" by campus leaders, or even a large majority.

Such restrictions do not work. And even if they did, they have unintended consequences that are worse than the problem they are trying to solve. There is only one solution to speech with which you bitterly disagree. Even if you find that speech hateful, the solution is MORE speech, not less. Free discussion (of course without any threat of force or coercion) is the only way to persuade others that some ideas are wrong. This essential process of open debate is short-circuited by labeling some speech as "intolerant" and shutting it down. If the Regents fall into this trap, it will result in a great University system failing in one of its most crucial missions. It would also expose the University to new legal challenges, some of which I suspect it would lose.

If there is a serious problem of intolerance at UC, you must diagnose it accurately before you can do something to reduce it. None of the previous speakers has given you an accurate diagnosis. The Regents do not need to start policing what costumes are worn to a frat party. A major source of the real problem is politicized classrooms. Consider a controversial issue--for example Israel and the Middle East.

When all discussions--from classrooms, to reading lists and syllabi, to speakers across campus, present only one point of view, this engenders contempt for opposing views. In that one-sided climate, anti-Israel hostility and partisanship will naturally get out of hand. That is unfortunately what is happening throughout UC, on many issues. The best solution is to return to the traditional academic model, where all sides of a question are explored, not just those supporting a particular ideology. This Principle is the best way, probably the only way, to defuse anti-Semitism and intolerance.

Thank you for considering this.

Sincerely,

Dr. Matthew Malkan,  
Prof. of Physics and Astronomy, UCLA