



August 16, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for raising your concerns about the Palestinian Feminist Collective solidarity statement that was joined by the USC's Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies ("GSS") as well as over a hundred other gender studies departments in the US and abroad. I apologize for not responding sooner and want to assure you that the issues raised are top and center for President Folt and me.

The first point I wish to make is that in deciding to join this statement, GSS did not consult with the University, and most importantly does *not* speak on behalf of the University. I am in the process right now of working with deans, departments and the Academic Senate to ensure everyone understands the critical difference between taking personal versus university-level stands on public and political matters.

I believe that we all agree that academic freedom is central to our mission as a university, and that it includes the right of faculty members to weigh in on the issues of the day without fear of institutional censorship or reprisal, <https://www.provost.usc.edu/usc-statement-free-speech/>. I did not interpret your concerns as an attempt to limit free speech, but rather to make clear the difference between individual and institutional stands.

The University's position aligns completely with policies long stated by the American Association of University Professors: "When speaking on public matters, faculty should strive to be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show appropriate respect for the opinions of others, and *should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution*" [emphasis added].

In the coming days and weeks, I will work with the Academic Senate to create guidelines for how a department, school, or group of faculty, staff, or students can be clear (e.g., with a written disclaimer) that they are not speaking on behalf of the institution in such matters.

A second set of issues that has been raised revolves around the processes of departmental participation in the creation of a statement that is attributed to the department as a whole. As implied in the AAUP statement, it is essential that no faculty member feels pressured or compelled to sign onto a statement with which they are not comfortable because it originates within their department or school. The proper attribution of such statements to individuals rather than university entities helps significantly with this issue. Of course in many cases, not all faculty are asked their opinions, and staff and students, as well, can feel excluded or left out of such statements, so this discussion is very timely.

Again, thank you for writing to me and to the President. Your outreach and questions from others regarding speech on our campus have prompted me to make these and other free speech issues a large part of our work with the Academic Senate this fall. I look forward to that dialogue and thank you for bringing attention to this issue. Please let me know if you have any further questions or comments at this time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charles Zukoski". The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops.

Charles F. Zukoski  
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Cc: Carol L. Folt