



Academic Dispatch

October 9, 2019

Respectful Listening

I write today to mention with some regret two separate events that occurred on our campus yesterday.

At the start of the academic year, I wrote that in our academic environment it is key “to embrace the tension of contrasting ideas and contrasting minds with optimism and perseverance. When a colleague challenges us, presenting alternative interpretations, differing value systems, or divergent thinking, an opportunity for learning has been presented.”

I know that we all embrace the value of academic freedom and understand the power of responding to speech with speech in an environment of honest debate and discussion. This is at the core of the academic values that we teach and live. This principle is enshrined in our policy on Freedom of Expression and Dissent, which notes: “the appropriate response to ... speech is speech expressing opposing ideas and continued dialogue, not curtailment of speech.”

Yesterday, in separate incidents, two of our colleagues elected to place posters expressing their views on the faculty unionization vote on some of our many public posting walls, places in which we are all free to share ideas. Others in our community quickly removed these posters, denying to their authors the audience to which they hoped to speak.

This action does not reflect our values of open debate, but rather it seeks only to prevent the speech of others. Those in our community who elect to express their ideas on faculty unionization, either in favor or in opposition, have a right for their ideas to be seen and heard.

As we approach the vote on unionization next week, I hope that all of us, no matter our views on the matter, can be free to share our ideas and listen to others, and that each of us will provide the space for others to express their views. The willingness to respectfully listen, and to respectfully express our own thoughts, is the foundation of a great university and the highest of academic values.

Dr. James Paul Holloway

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs
Professor of Nuclear Engineering

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