Paul J. Zinng's Form Response:

Dear _____:

Thank you for taking the time to contact Cal Poly regarding what you apparently have read or heard about an alleged First Amendment issue at the University. The University is concerned that many people are being misled, purposefully or otherwise, about free speech at Cal Poly.

Recent Internet, print and TV talk show coverage surrounding promotion of a speech by a visitor to Cal Poly has contained many inaccuracies, misinformation, and even falsehoods.

Let me assure you that Cal Poly highly values the First Amendment and free speech. It is at the core of our identity as an American institution of higher education. The University strives to create and maintain a campus environment that supports free speech and open inquiry for all. This campus does not practice censorship of thought or word, or impose bans on speech or expression. Indeed, Cal Poly places among its top priority establishing conditions that foster open inquiry and healthy debate for all.

Fliers advertising the speech of this particular visitor were posted on bulletin boards and kiosks throughout campus. The speech on campus was attended by some 250 students, and written up afterwards in the Mustang Daily, the campus student newspaper. You can read the article on the Mustang Daily’s web site at:
hllp://www.mustangdail,y.calpoly.edu/archive/20021 I I 5/index.php?story--n4.

We cannot address the specifics of the controversy because federal privacy laws prevent the University from discussing student discipline cases. Although students may waive their privacy rights and allow universities to discuss their discipline cases, the student involved in this case has not signed a general waiver despite our request that he do so. He has instead provided us with a limited waiver which allows us to discuss his case only with staff members of FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education), and no one else. Unless the student signs a general waiver, the University will be unable to discuss the discipline case more broadly and reveal the full

story behind it. That story is very different from what you have apparently read or heard or concluded.

However, without discussing the specifics of the student's case, I can tell you that this is a case involving student conduct, not speech content. Any characterization to the contrary is false. Cal Poly supports and upholds freedom of speech as a Constitutional right, and the University has policies in place to protect the rights of all parties on campus to pursue learning and otherwise go about their business. These include policies regarding the disruption of classes, meetings and other University business. California State University regulations regarding “time, place and manner” of expression implemented by Cal Poly exist to protect open expression, not stifle it, to balance the nature of a university as a free and ordered space.

I hope you would agree that, in general, while all of us enjoy the right to freedom of speech, it does not include permission to disrupt scheduled meetings or classes while doing so — in other words, to infringe on the rights of others.

Because open inquiry is a cornerstone of our learning environment, Cal Poly offers and supports many venues for freedom of expression, including rallies, impromptu speeches in public areas, and public bulletin boards throughout campus. We will continue to do so, and we will continue to encourage our students to listen to speakers with differing points of view.

As for the resolution of the student judicial case, Cal Poly considers the matter closed and will not be pursuing it further.

For more information, please visit
http://www.calpolynews.calpoly.edu/free-speech.html

Sincerely,
Paul J. Zingg
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs