



Sabrina Conza <[sabrina.conza@thefire.org](mailto:sabrina.conza@thefire.org)>

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**Re: Letter from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression,  
April 6, 2023**

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**Robert King** <[bobbyking@sfsu.edu](mailto:bobbyking@sfsu.edu)>  
To: Sabrina Conza <[sabrina.conza@thefire.org](mailto:sabrina.conza@thefire.org)>  
Hi, Sabrina.

Mon, Apr 10, 2023 at 3:31 PM

Thanks for your message

Below is the message that went out to all campus today on a number of topics. In it the president again affirms her support for academic freedom and the faculty.

Bobby King  
*Director of Communications, Office of the President*  
San Francisco State University  
[bobbyking@sfsu.edu](mailto:bobbyking@sfsu.edu)  
(415) 338-2558



Dear campus community,

Last week was a hard one for San Francisco State. As an academic community, we are deeply committed to academic freedom, freedom of expression and to the right to teach and learn free from censorship. But, as we have seen here and at many universities, balancing these with dearly held commitments to inclusion and social justice is hard and painful. We saw this all too clearly last week in two unrelated incidents.

The first involving a class illustrated how challenging it is to implement antidiscrimination policies, processes, and trainings, especially in connection with academic freedom. The second centered on a controversial speaker whose remarks rejected our University's deeply held values of inclusion and social justice and were deeply hurtful to many members of our community.

The Classroom Incident. Last week, the Office of Equity Programs & Compliance initiated an investigation into an incident that occurred in an Islamic Studies class. Our systemwide antidiscrimination policies and processes are governed by federal and state laws, and they are complicated and legalistic. In this case, our implementation of these policies prompted faculty concerns about academic freedom.

I am deeply committed to protecting academic freedom. I am also deeply committed to protecting our students' and employees' rights to learn and work in an environment that is free from harassment and other forms of discrimination. This incident highlights some of the challenges that SF State and other CSU universities face in implementing our systemwide antidiscrimination policies. SF State will work swiftly to address the concerns raised by all involved in this complaint and will include the Academic Freedom Committee in that work.

I offer my personal apology to all who have been disappointed by the University's response to this incident, particularly the professor whose experiences illustrated these challenges and the students

who felt disrespected and unheard when they shared their concerns.

The Public Speaker. Last Thursday, Turning Point USA hosted an event on campus that advocated for the exclusion of trans people in athletics. The event was deeply traumatic for many in our trans and LGBTQ+ communities, and the speaker's message outraged many members of the SF State community who value inclusion and social justice.

I applaud the students, staff and faculty who rallied quickly to host alternative inclusive events, protest peacefully and provide one another with support at a difficult moment. Unlike previous events on this campus and other campuses, I am proud to say that the First Amendment was honored. The speaker expressed her views and engaged in dialogue with those present. In fact, a Turning Point USA representative noted in a media interview that the discussion was "constructive and polite." Unfortunately, a disturbance after the event concluded delayed the speaker's departure. We are reviewing the incident and, as always, will learn from the experience.

Due to the attention this speaker received from national media, you may see or receive communications critical of the University, its employees, and its values. Please respect their right to voice that opinion, even if it differs greatly from your own as long as you do not feel personally threatened. If you do feel threatened, contact the [Office of Campus Safety](#) or the [University Police Department](#) immediately. Please also avail yourselves of the support services for [students](#) or [employees](#) as needed.

Universities are complex places that require and deserve complex responses for our community to thrive. We must be rigorous in protecting academic freedom and freedom of expression, but we also have a responsibility, individually and as a community, to express respect and compassion for one another. I ask that you all take some time this week, and every week, to check in with a student, with a colleague, and offer an ear, a shoulder and compassion. And to our trans community, please know how welcome you are. We will turn this moment into an opportunity to listen and learn about how we can better support you.

In closing, I am thrilled to report on the near-conclusion of our [WASC reaccreditation process](#). While we will not receive the final report for several weeks, I share with you the commendations we received from the review team last Friday. We were commended for promoting student well-being and student success; for our inclusive strategic planning; for improving communications and expanding leadership opportunities to better include more perspectives; and for establishing the Enrollment Operations and Retention Operation committees who are removing obstacles to student success with great speed and enthusiasm.

There was one more—I saved the best for last. We were commended for "demonstrating the institution's orientation to social justice and its history of activism." Last week, we saw this demonstration in our commitment to creating a community free of discrimination, our commitment to protesting ideologies of exclusion and in our commitment to free speech. Some of it we did well and some needs improvement.

As the president of an educational institution, I embrace this as an opportunity to learn and grow. We will review and improve our implementation of the CSU's antidiscrimination policies, processes, and trainings. We will ardently defend faculty rights to academic freedom and our community's right to work and learn free from discrimination and harassment. We will continue our work to provide space for all speakers. And we will continue to provide resources and support for all members of our community, each and every one of whom belongs at San Francisco State. I cannot promise we will always do this perfectly. I can promise that this will be hard and messy, and that we will continue to learn together.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynn". The letters are fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and a trailing flourish.

Lynn Mahoney, Ph.D.  
President

[Quoted text hidden]