

DATE: August 23, 2017
To: Students, Faculty and Staff
Subject: Free Speech

This fall, the issue of free speech will once more engage our community in powerful and complex ways. Events in Charlottesville, with their racism, bigotry, violence and mayhem, make the issue of free speech even more tense. The law is very clear; public institutions like UC Berkeley must permit speakers invited in accordance with campus policies to speak, without discrimination in regard to point of view. The United States has the strongest free speech protections of any liberal democracy; the First Amendment protects even speech that most of us would find hateful, abhorrent and odious, and the courts have consistently upheld these protections.

But the most powerful argument for free speech is not one of legal constraint—that we're required to allow it—but of value. The public expression of many sharply divergent points of view is fundamental both to our democracy and to our mission as a university. The philosophical justification underlying free speech, most powerfully articulated by John Stuart Mill in his book, *On Liberty*, rests on two basic assumptions. The first is that truth is of such power that it will always ultimately prevail; any abridgement of argument therefore compromises the opportunity of exchanging error for truth. The second is an extreme skepticism about the right of any authority to determine which opinions are noxious or abhorrent. Once you embark on the path to censorship, you make your own speech vulnerable to it.

Berkeley, as you know, is the home of the Free Speech Movement, where students on the right and students on the left united to fight for the right to advocate political views on campus. Particularly now, it is critical that the Berkeley community come together once again to protect this right. It is who we are.

Nonetheless, defending the right of free speech for those whose ideas we find offensive is not easy. It often conflicts with the values we hold as a community—tolerance, inclusion, reason and diversity. Some constitutionally-protected speech attacks the very identity of particular groups of individuals in ways that are deeply hurtful. However, the right response is not the heckler's veto, or what some call platform denial. Call toxic speech out for what it is, don't shout it down, for in shouting it down, you collude in the narrative that universities are not open to all speech. Respond to hate speech with more speech.

We all desire safe space, where we can be ourselves and find support for our identities. You have the right at Berkeley to expect the university to keep you physically safe. But we would be providing students with a less valuable education, preparing them less well for the world after graduation, if we tried to shelter them from ideas that many find wrong, even dangerous. We must show that we can choose what to listen to, that we can cultivate our own arguments and that we can

develop inner resilience, which is the surest form of safe space. These are not easy tasks, and we will offer support services for those who desire them.

This September, Ben Shapiro and Milo Yiannopoulos have both been invited by student groups to speak at Berkeley. The university has the responsibility to provide safety and security for its community and guests, and we will invest the necessary resources to achieve that goal. If you choose to protest, do so peacefully. That is your right, and we will defend it with vigor. We will not tolerate violence, and we will hold anyone accountable who engages in it.

We will have many opportunities this year to come together as a Berkeley community over the issue of free speech; it will be a free speech year. We have already planned a student panel, a faculty panel and several book talks. Bridge USA and the Center for New Media will hold a day-long conference on October 5; PEN, the international writers' organization, will hold a free speech convening in Berkeley on October 23. We are planning a series in which people with sharply divergent points of view will meet for a moderated discussion. Free speech is our legacy, and we have the power once more to shape this narrative.

Sincerely,

Carol Christ
Chancellor