

Statement of undersigned members of the UCLA Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Writing Programs Faculty in response to the forcible removal of the Student Encampment

May 2, 2024

As members of English, Comparative Literature, and Writing Programs we write to condemn the response of UCLA to the student encampment in support of Palestine. The encampment on Royce Quad is right outside our faculty offices in Kaplan Hall and many of us witnessed the peaceful, disciplined, and morally courageous protests of the students since April 25, 2024.

On April 30, Chancellor Gene D. Block misrepresented the protests, calling their tactics “shocking and shameful,” alluding to unspecified “instances of violence,” and labeling the encampment “unauthorized.” He called on law enforcement to secure the area, removed barriers, and threatened suspension and expulsion. At the same time, UCLA did nothing to address the violence the students were subjected to every night, even granting a permit right next to their encampment for a rally on April 28, with a jumbotron transmitting images of rape, children crying, and loud music every night and day to terrorize the students.

On the evening of April 30, a violent mob attacked UCLA students for several hours, while university leadership was nowhere to be found. Several of our faculty were present to witness the abandonment of the basic responsibility of the University to protect students from a raging mob. Security personnel and campus police watched the siege and did nothing. UCLA was widely mocked in the media for refusing to protect its students, and condemned by the Mayor of Los Angeles and the Governor of California, as we await the results of an external inquiry into the appalling incidents of the night. Not a single person has been held accountable, despite being captured on camera in the very act of violence.

Instead of going after the violent agitators, UCLA then turned on its own. Royce quad became a war zone, watched around the world as UCPD, CHP, LASD, SRT, and university-paid private security, armed with riot gear, hiding their badges and body cams, unleashed a crackdown on the encampment. Police used Kaplan Hall as their staging area, refusing entry to faculty trying to access their offices and asking us to leave. Setting hordes of police in riot gear on peaceful student and faculty protestors overnight fundamentally counters the very mission of our university. The massing of militarized police (snipers, flashbangs, tear gas, stun grenades, batons, zip-ties, rubber bullets) is unforgivable.

These inexcusable actions – allowing mobs to attack students and faculty on April 30 and law enforcement to make brutal mass arrests of students and faculty on May 1 – make Gene Block unfit to fulfill his role. We call for the resignation of Chancellor Gene Block.

We also call for complete amnesty for all protestors. UCLA cannot call itself a public university if it does not protect our first amendment rights. As humanists, we have watched our students sing, write, speak, knit, play, dance, and pray with grace and love. They should be allowed to continue to do so. UCLA should be at the forefront of the national student movement against genocide and not turn our campus into a display of unchecked police brutality.

Signed:

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