

April 3, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing to request a formal investigation into the on-campus arrest and subsequent termination of Francisca Trigueros, a long-time Aramark custodial worker responsible for maintaining the 4th through 9th floors of the Seeley G. Mudd building (SGM) on the University Park campus. In addition, we are seeking clarification with respect to the university policies that allowed this situation, described below, to unfold as it did.

On Thursday, March 10th, Francisca found a backpack containing a substantial amount of money while cleaning a classroom on the sixth floor of the building (SGM 601). Within the Department of Psychology, lost items are typically returned to the main department office (SGM 501). Faculty, staff, and students regularly inquire about lost items in SGM 501 and those items are often there waiting for them. Because Francisca could not locate any SGM 501 staff members immediately after finding the backpack, she locked it in her supply closet for safekeeping until she was able to make the return. In the meantime, the student to whom the backpack belonged filed a report with USC's Department of Public Safety (DPS).

On Tuesday, March 15th, Francisca was unexpectedly arrested for grand theft by the LAPD on the first floor of SGM, in the presence of a DPS officer and an Aramark supervisor. She was subsequently transported by the LAPD to the 77th St. Regional Jail. Prior to this point, neither Francisca nor any faculty or staff in the Department of Psychology were interviewed (by DPS or LAPD) about the missing backpack. At the time of the arrest, the backpack and all of its contents were still safely locked away. Even so, Francisca was immediately suspended without pay and prevented from taking personal days to recoup lost income. She has since been fired for her good faith effort to keep a student's missing possessions safe.

Faculty, staff, and students in the Department of Psychology have entrusted Francisca with our offices and lab spaces (containing computers, technical equipment, data, and specimens that are critical to our scientific careers) for decades. Despite 24 years of service to the university, she has now lost her livelihood and is facing further legal complications due to a simple misunderstanding that could have been easily resolved with a five-minute conversation.

In light of this incident, we are requesting a formal investigation that, at minimum, provides specific answers to the following questions:

- Why was Francisca not first asked (by her Aramark supervisors or by DPS) about the missing backpack in question before she was arrested by the LAPD?

- More broadly, is it possible for any USC employee, contractor, or student to be arrested on campus without first being made aware that they are a person of interest in a case? Could a tenured faculty member, for example, find themselves in a similar position?
- What role, if any, did DPS or Aramark play in providing evidence to the LAPD to establish probable cause prior to Francisca's arrest?
- In general, under what circumstances does DPS refer a case to the LAPD for further investigation? What role do university employees (DPS officers and otherwise) play in assisting with these cases?
- On what specific grounds was Francisca terminated from her position with Aramark?
- Is simply being *accused* of a crime sufficient for termination of a university employee or contractor?

Finally, we firmly believe that USC should make every effort to (1) help reinstate Francisca's employment in the aftermath of this incident and (2) protect its faculty, staff, students, and contractors from wrongful on-campus arrests. The university's stated commitment to accountability¹, open communication², well-being³, integrity⁴, excellence⁵, and diversity, equity, and inclusion⁶ requires nothing less.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Signatories from [the Department of Psychology](#), [university governance](#), and [the USC community more broadly](#) begin on the following page

[If you would like to sign this letter in support, you may do so at bit.ly/FranciscaPetition. Please do not request edit access to this document to add your signature manually. Signatures will be added from the Google form as time permits.]

An important note from faculty in the Department of Psychology: We do not know--nor are we interested in learning--the identity of the person who lost their backpack. We are shocked by the level of support this letter has received and also by some of the vitriol we have seen directed towards this (still unidentified, to our knowledge) person on social media. This vitriol is not acceptable and, most importantly, does an immense disservice to our efforts to support Francisca.

¹ "We do not apply different standards based on power or status. We do not blame others for our own mistakes. We do not retaliate. We do not cover-up our mistakes. We do not avoid addressing problems." Unifying Values, *USC Culture Journey*. <https://culturejourney.usc.edu/explore/unifying-values>

² "We do not hoard, withhold or distort information. We do not bully or retaliate when concerns are expressed." Ibid.

³ "We prioritize individual and community well-being when creating policies and practices in the workplace." Ibid.

⁴ "We stand up for what is right, regardless of status or power. We do not cover up wrong-doing." Ibid.

⁵ "We do not operate in secrecy. We do not exclude individuals impacted by a decision." Ibid.

⁶ "We courageously engage in uncomfortable conversations. We dedicate resources, programs, individual and institutional support to ensure DEI is a foundational principle in everything we do. We do not remain silent when we witness discrimination, harassment, or retaliation. We do not engage in conduct that intentionally harms another." Ibid.

FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

1. Leslie Berntsen, Ph.D., Lecturer in Psychology and Natural Sciences Representative, Dornsife Faculty Council
2. Darby Saxbe, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology
3. Joseph Árvai, Ph.D., Dana and David Dornsife Professor of Psychology
4. Shannon O'Flinn, Ph.D., Associate Professor of the Practice of Psychology
5. Gerald C. Davison, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology
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18. Morteza Dehghani, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology and Computer Science
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29. Ellen Leggett, Ed.D., Professor of the Practice of Psychology and Program Director, MS in Applied Psychology
30. Toben Mintz, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology
31. Mark Lai, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychology
32. Melissa Reyes, Project Assistant
33. Erika Quinly, Program Specialist, Clinical Science Doctoral Program
34. Ingrid Popper, Student Services Advisor II
35. Emily Saldich, Program Assistant
36. Greg Flores, Budget/Business Analyst
37. Vivian K. Hsu-Tran, M.Ed., Student Services Advisor I

38. Twyla Ponton, Administrative Assistant
39. Esthelle Ewusi Boisvert, Doctoral Candidate in Clinical Science and Vice President of Advocacy, Graduate Student Government
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51. Carol Iskiwitch, Doctoral Candidate in Social Psychology
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54. Lai Xu, Doctoral Student in Quantitative Methods and Computational Psychology
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75. Regina Brodell, Doctoral Student in Clinical Science
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85. Joshua Inwald, Ph.D. Candidate in Social Psychology
86. Michelle Sarraf, Doctoral Student in Social Psychology
87. Nina Christie, M.A., M.P.H., Doctoral Candidate in Brain and Cognitive Science
88. Winnie Wing-Yee Tse, Doctoral Student in Quantitative Methods and Computational Psychology
89. Yema Conteh, Doctoral Student in Social Psychology

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93. Jean Kim, PhD, PSYC Ph.D. Alum, 2017
94. Matthew Multach, Ph.D., PSYC Ph.D. Alum, 2021
95. Randy Bautista, Ph.D., PSYC Ph.D. Alum, 2016
96. Tana Luo, Ph.D., PSYC Ph.D. Alum, 2010s
97. Tiffany Ito, Ph.D., PSYC Ph.D. Alum, 1995

98. Trinity Anthony, Undergraduate Student
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102. Honorio Antonio, Undergraduate Student
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104. Anonymous, Undergraduate Student
105. Cameron Paul, Undergraduate Student
106. Amanda Johnson, Undergraduate Student
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145. Chloe Duckworth, Undergraduate Student
146. Christopher Merino Brito, Undergraduate Student
147. David Grosfeld, Undergraduate Student
148. Denise [last name withheld], Undergraduate Student
149. Giancarlo Rodriguez, Undergraduate Student
150. Giselle Vaca, Undergraduate Student

151. Anonymous, PSYC B.A. Alum, 2020
152. Catherine Alfaro, PSYC B.A. Alum, 2018
153. Jesus Carreon, PSYC B.A. Alum, 2017

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