

## **Statement of Members of the UCLA Disability Studies Program on the Right to Protest Peacefully without Fear of Violence**

May 3, 2024

We, the undersigned faculty of the Disability Studies Program, including members who were violently assaulted on the night of 30 April, condemn in the strongest possible terms the violent mob and police attacks on our students and colleagues between the nights of 30 April and 2 May. As a program that exists thanks to acts of civil disobedience that led to social change, (including the occupation of federal buildings by disability activists), we feel especially strongly that the university must protect our students' rights to free speech and peaceful protest. We are appalled by the university administration's utter failure to protect the well-being of the members of our campus community and to support our students' right to protest in safety.

The encampment that our students launched on April 25, 2024 in support of Palestinian rights served as a model of peaceful and self-disciplined protest. Despite being nightly harassed by the verbally and physically violent outside agitators, students followed a de-escalation policy and avoided engagement with hecklers. The administration chose to ignore this systematic violence and instead authorized the erection of a jumbotron right across the encampment, which transmitted round the clock violent images, traumatizing sounds, and excessively loud music to terrorize the protesting students, and alongside them, the entire campus. Our campus leadership remained completely quiet about the rising vigilante violence against students.

On 30 April, President Drake issued a statement declaring that the encampment was "unlawful." Chancellor Block followed up with another statement, calling the encampment "unauthorized" and protesters' tactics "shocking and shameful," while also deliberately mischaracterizing the encampment as a threat to the safety of Jewish students, who in fact made up a significant portion of the protestors. These statements signaled the withdrawal of official protections from peaceful student protests. Just a few hours following the statements, emboldened by the actions and inactions of the university administrators, a violent right-wing pro-Israel mob assaulted the students and faculty inside the encampment with pepper spray, fireworks, metal rods, and bottles. Daily Bruin reporters outside the encampment were also targeted by the mob. University administrators, security personnel, and the police literally stood by and watched these attacks, injuring many students and faculty, for many hours and made no effort to stop the mob. Not a single attacker was held accountable.

On 2 May, the same police who stood by as students faced a mob attack violently stormed the camp with rubber bullets, batons and flash-bang grenades, injuring many and arresting hundreds of students and several faculty members, and tore down the encampment. Chancellor Block's message in the aftermath of the police attack unfortunately continues to misrepresent how violence erupted in the first place and mask university administration's utter incompetence and complete abdication of responsibility.

As scholars with commitments to disability justice, we support students' right to protest peacefully and affirm their demands for police abolition on campus. We support UCLA's divestment from mass disabling

structures of militarism, which in this case is directly responsible for the indiscriminate bombing of innocent civilians.

- We demand dropping all legal and disciplinary charges against protesters.
- We demand university assistance for injured students through payment of medical bills.
- We demand accountability for these horrific acts of violence and call for the immediate resignation of Chancellor Gene Block, whose inept decisions imperiled our students' lives and liberties.

Signed (alphabetical by last name):

Can Aciksoz  
Juliann Anesi  
Helen Deutsch  
Raymond Knapp  
Lauren Lee McCarthy  
Victoria Marks  
Kathleen McHugh  
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