

August 21, 2020

Dr. Dina Rizk Khoury
Dr. Zachary Lockman
Middle East Studies Association of North America

Dear Dina and Zachary,

Thank you for reaching out with your concerns regarding the challenges that we are going through on campus now. I very much appreciate your letter.

The main point I tried to convey in the memo was that no student should feel excluded from participating in student government based solely on identity or affiliation with a recognized student organization, and that no student should be targeted by online vitriol and abuse. In no way was the memo intended to chill academic discourse or curtail free speech. As you rightly noted, the principle of expansive free speech is sacred for our university community and is a foundational pillar for everything we do at USC – from research, to teaching, to creative expression, to advocacy. We do not penalize or punish faculty or students for constitutionally protected speech and we actively encourage our university community to debate and engage the most complex and contentious issues and challenges of our time.

Moving forward, we realize we need a better institutional framework for helping us think through our responses for antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other kinds of bias and discrimination on campus. I have recently instituted a number of changes and opportunities that I believe will be helpful in this regard, including the creation of our inaugural Chief Inclusion and Diversity Officer position and the convening of a new President's and Provost's Task Force on Racial Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We plan on spending the year working with university thought leaders so that we can better address these campus challenges in the future.

Many thanks for all the work that you do on campus and in the world. I hope you and your families are staying safe and well.

All the best,



Carol L. Folt
President

Cc: Charles Zukoski, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
Winston B. Crisp, Vice President for Student Affairs