

Dear Colleagues,

I want to update you on the actions taken by the Board of Trustees at their special meeting on February 22. The Trustees agreed on steps that they sincerely hope will bring closure to a chain of events that has led to the distress for many, most especially, an Orange Coast College professor and a student.

As a result, the Board is calling for an immediate end to the fact finding and review processes related to comments made by a faculty member following last year's presidential election and the digital recording of the professor's comments by a student that was subsequently posted on social media.

The Board is directing the College administration to rescind sanctions for the student who recorded the comments and that no discipline be imposed on the faculty member. This means, the student will continue to attend classes without interruption and the professor has returned from leave and is back in the classroom this semester. The Board believes this is in the interest of fairness and equity for all.

The Board statement to the media read, "it is time to move forward with increased empathy and understanding of the differences that have and will exist on a campus filled with individuals from an array of backgrounds who bring with them a wide range of political views, religious affiliations and ideals. This is part of what makes OCC great."

Additionally, the Board statement said, "the student in this case felt he could not freely share his political views in a classroom which is why he felt his only recourse was to record a lecture he felt was unfair", and "the professor in this case felt she was sharing her views and responding to numerous students who voiced concerns about the political climate."

At Orange Coast College, we will continue to protect the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty to promote freedom of speech and academic freedom.

We want to begin the healing process. The College will create avenues and provide resources to help everyone come together as a campus and as a community. Staff of the Orange County Human Relations Commission will be coming to OCC to help with mediation and counseling of clubs. We will focus on communication, understanding, freedom of expression and academic freedom at our next FLEX Day gathering before the end of the semester.

I have directed the Vice President of Student Services and the Vice President of Instruction to review our student code of conduct and the College Internet policies for faculty, staff and students. We will work within our shared governance process to update and modify these policies and other procedures if necessary.



ORANGE COAST COLLEGE

I want to thank everyone at Orange Coast College who has been on the front lines during the last few months. The Answer Center has done an incredible job with the deluge, of often times, negative calls. Many thanks to Campus Safety, and I acknowledge that this has taken a toll on them personally and consumed weeks of time away from their normal work duties. I also want to thank the President of Coast Federation of Educators and Academic Senate for their collaboration in promoting free speech and academic freedom.

Orange Coast College now has a unique opportunity for a recommitment to open dialogue, sincere discussions and a better understanding of the diverse perspectives that enrich and enlighten everyone at Orange Coast College and the Coast Community College District.

We acknowledge that conversations about these topics are difficult, and although we may agree to disagree at times, it is important to have these conversations at every level. We support a continuance of dialogue and encourage a healthy exchange of ideas, about how to best serve our students with an excellent education.

Best,

Dennis Harkins, Ph.D.