

October 31, 2014

Chancellor Linda P.B. Katehi
University of California, Davis
Office of the Chancellor
Fifth Floor, Mrak Hall
One Shields Avenue
Davis, California 95616

URGENT

Sent via U.S. Mail and Facsimile (530-752-2400)

Dear Chancellor Katehi:

As you can see from the list of our directors and board of advisors, FIRE unites civil rights and civil liberties leaders, scholars, journalists, and public intellectuals across the political and ideological spectra on behalf of liberty, due process, legal equality, voluntary association, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and academic freedom on our nation's college campuses. Our website, thefire.org, will give you a greater sense of our identity and activities.

FIRE is concerned about the threat to freedom of conscience posed by the University of California, Davis' (UC Davis') mandatory online Violence Intervention & Prevention program. While much of the program is unobjectionable, one module requires students to agree that certain types of constitutionally protected expression are "problematic" in order to complete the module. Failing to agree with UC Davis' approved opinion has negative consequences; students who do not complete the module are prevented from registering for classes. This compelled speech is incompatible with your students' expressive rights as protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

This is our understanding of the facts; please inform us if you believe we are in error.

At the start of the Fall 2014 quarter, new UC Davis students received an email from Sarah Meredith, Education & Outreach Coordinator of the Campus Violence Prevention Program, titled "Mandatory Violence Prevention Education Requirement for UC Davis

Incoming Students." Meredith's email described the university's "requirement that all

Violence Intervention & Prevention program appears to be designed to teach. The university may certainly require its students to take instruction on the applicable laws and university policies relating to sexual assault, harassment, and other forms of misconduct, but students must be free—while obeying constitutionally valid university policies—to maintain their own private beliefs about those policies and the implications of particular words and viewpoints.

At the heart of the First Amendment's protection of freedom of conscience is a recognition of our own limitations: Like us, those in power are neither omniscient nor omnipotent, and therefore have no right to dictate to others what personal beliefs are acceptable to hold. Our nation's respect for the inviolable sanctity of the individual mind is rooted in the wisdom of humility and restraint. It is hard to imagine a social goal more benign than that of reducing the heinous crime of sexual assault. However, by dictating to students the specific ideological, political, and moral assumptions they *must* make in order to attend the university, this program impermissibly crosses the boundary from education into thought reform.

FIRE asks that you revise the Violence Intervention & Prevention training program immediately so that it no longer requires students to take a stance with which they may disagree in order to complete the training and continue their education. Since we understand that making the appropriate revisions may take time, we ask that in the interim, no holds be placed on the registration of students who may object to the training as currently offered.

Since the university is set to place holds on the registration of non-compliant students by Friday, November 7, FIRE asks you to respond immediately by announcing that no such holds will be placed and by informing FIRE that you have done so. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,