



October 19, 2016

To the Campus Community:

Tonight we will see the final presidential debate of 2016. Many anticipate the worst: a dispiriting spectacle of slogans, simplifications, and insults. As tempting as it may be to point fingers at our national political culture “out there,” the truth is that we have seen similar slash-and-burn tactics “right here” at UCLA: social media attacks, posters that threaten and intimidate, graffiti and chalking that demean and accuse, knee jerk condemnation and cheap shots.

This should not surprise us. At home and abroad, we live in a time of deep ideological differences and sharp political divides. Given the extraordinary diversity represented on our campus, it would be shocking if the tensions of broader society did not manifest here. But we must be more than a simple reflection of the morass we see on cable news and social media. Our students are amongst the most talented in the world. Our faculty and staff are amongst the most accomplished. As Bruins we embody the characteristics necessary for leadership and take seriously our responsibility to train those who will be the global leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, we cannot accept the negativity that too often passes for leadership in our nation. We have the ability, as well as the responsibility, to set a higher standard.

How do we do that? As Bruins we must reject the politics of fear, the strong-arm tactics of intimidation, and the shallowness of caricature. We must push ourselves to go deeper in our thinking and broader in our ability to engage others. We need to elevate [dialogue over demagoguery](#), ideas over insults. That means fundamentally respecting the humanity of even those who disagree with our core beliefs and commitments.

At a world-class university, we must re-commit ourselves to intellectual integrity and never forget that facts do matter. That means having the courage to be self-critical, to admit what we do not know, to concede and embrace that we can learn from others – including from those with whom we disagree. We must recognize that safe spaces are necessary, but so are brave spaces where we venture into the unknown and step out of our comfort zones to seek challenge and transformation. And as we boldly engage, we must humbly recognize that all of us are both flawed and extraordinary, simultaneously capable of causing grave harms and doing great things.

We are trying to do our part to elevate the discourse. The [Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#) has launched both the [CrossCheck](#) blog and the [CrossCheck Live](#) forums to tackle complex issues, beyond the sound bite. We’ve created a [Student Advisory Board](#) with extraordinary members tasked to show how smarts, passion, and a commitment to action can help build an equal learning environment.

Student Affairs exists on this campus to foster and support student development, and thus engages students in a variety of initiatives — including the [Intergroup Relations Program](#), the Courses of Actions dinners and the [Common Book experience](#) — that are designed to provide opportunities for students to share and understand each other across lines of difference. As students work to navigate the inevitable difficulties and challenges that occur through their development, Student Affairs departments, such as [CAPS](#), [CPO](#), the [Dean of Students Office](#), the [BRC](#), [Residential Life](#), and more have programs, services and resources to help guide and support you through this process. And of course we welcome your ideas on how we can all nurture micro-connections — those moments when we discover surprising similarities, unexpected understandings, and overlapping commitments — that build bonds across our diverse community.

We are realists. We know that we cannot stop the ugliness that mars our national political culture overnight. In our digital age we cannot stop those who delight in spreading divisiveness through the internet and hide behind grandiloquent claims of principle. On an open campus we cannot censor deeply offensive speech or ban provocateurs who prey on the unpopular. We cannot end distant wars or resolve ancient divisions.

But we can be determined to be better than what surrounds us. We can define and build the community we want, one that is honest, smart, open-minded, critical but constructive supportive and compassionate. And by building that community, here at UCLA, we can set the new standard of what intellectual, ethical, and political leadership should look like. We can take inspiration from Chancellor Block’s call for UCLA to be “a place where we all learn that a healthy community requires the ability to reach across lines of difference, to work through inevitable problems, to understand how we can hurt each other at our worst and how we may heal each other at our best.” This won’t be easy, but we can all seek to be brave.

Sincerely,

***Jerry Kang***  
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Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs