



December 3, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your letter about this matter, which has disturbed us deeply as we understand very well the hurtful impact of the statements on Twitter that you quoted, not only to those who are Jewish but also to those of us who know how harmful antisemitism is when left unchecked. As we have [stated publicly](#) and repeated in many other messages, we emphatically denounce all forms of antisemitism and anti-Jewish hatred. As the leaders of USC, we take these statements personally and will uphold our responsibility to protect those who trust our institution to provide a safe place to study, work, and live.

We want to clarify some important issues raised in your letter and share some of what we are doing at USC to make our campuses safe and welcoming for all members of the Jewish community.

As you might imagine, the university is not able to monitor the personal social media activities of our more than 44,000 students – or our faculty and staff, for that matter. At any given moment, controversial statements are being posted on social media by individuals who may be associated with USC, even though their sentiments do not in any way represent our policies or values. The fact that we do not respond to every objectionable post is most likely because we are unaware of them until they are brought to our attention, or because they are being dealt with privately. Just because an individual is associated with the university does not mean that they represent us or that we accept their views. Our mission is to educate our community to be more considerate and thoughtful, and to engage in open and civil discussion and debate.

As I am sure you are aware, we are legally required to protect student privacy and cannot discuss university processes or actions with respect to a specific student, much less denounce them publicly. As a general matter, though, when hateful or potentially threatening social media statements are brought to our attention, we analyze them carefully. Every situation is different and must be understood from a variety of perspectives – legal, threat, EEO-TIX, educational, psychological wellness, and others. Many offices are involved, and we must make sure our actions do not do further harm or create targeting. Due to the nature of student privacy laws, these processes do not play out publicly, but I want to assure you that the university is highly responsive behind the scenes when such matters are brought to our attention.

We want to respectfully point out to you that your letter repeats misinformation that was spread by individuals and websites outside USC. For example, the student in question has not appropriated the title of “DEI Senator.” The student was elected by the Viterbi Graduate Student Association, which did not know at the time about the tweets the student had posted during the summer and subsequently removed. Further, it is not up to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office, or the university, to determine whether any student may retain a role in a student-led organization. For the university to remove anyone from a student-elected position based on protected speech would violate the California Leonard Law. We understand that, in view of what was initially posted and the hurt it caused, this is difficult to accept, but the university must always abide by the law.

In your letter you assert that university leadership has not taken a strong position with respect to the tweets in question. We want to reassure you that nothing could be further from the truth. As you indicated in your letter, the two most troubling tweets at issue were made in May and June of 2021, and subsequently removed by the student before the start of the semester. After the tweets first came to the university's attention over the summer, the university (as has been publicly reported) removed the student from a paid mentoring position in the Viterbi School of Engineering. Just before Thanksgiving, the deleted tweets were re-published by outside organizations, which urged supporters to protest by writing to the dean of the school, who had no control over either the original tweets or the student's election to the student organization. Nevertheless, the Viterbi School quickly issued a public statement denouncing these hateful statements as being contrary to our university's values. During the last week, Dean Yannis Yortsos and both of us have responded similarly to hundreds of emails that have been sent to us regarding this situation.

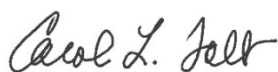
It is appalling that antisemitism continues to exist as a scourge across the nation and the world, and we will continue to work tirelessly with you and others to stamp it out. We are proud of the many ways in which USC is combatting antisemitism and working to create a welcoming campus for all our students. For instance, the USC Shoah Foundation is one of the preeminent institutes in the nation working to counter antisemitism and other forms of hatred and intolerance on a broad level. The university and the Shoah Foundation have partnered on the [Stronger Than Hate](#) initiative, which empowers teens and young adults to recognize and counter hate in their own communities, including on our own campuses. We also work closely with and support several campus and students' organizations – Hillel, Chabad, Office of Religious and Spiritual Life – to ensure students have a safe haven and can express their Jewish identity. Our Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life, Varun Soni, led a working group to examine antisemitism on our campuses, and we are currently examining the recommendations to make all students, staff, and faculty safer. We are continuing to deepen our understanding of manifestations of antisemitism on campus, and we will continue to support programs, groups, and actions that will help us address it.

It is important to recognize that we are dealing with a global phenomenon which is beyond the control of any one institution. We can assure you that when the Jewish community comes under attack on our campuses, we feel it as an attack on all of us. The only way we will defeat such hatred is if we stand together. As aggrieved as you feel about what happened, it is important to remember that we are being targeted by multiple organizations, some of which have agendas calculated to sow discord, misunderstanding, and distrust. As hard as it may seem to achieve, we will be most successful when we develop trust and take this on together.

We have taken the time to clarify these matters because they are vitally important to you and to all of us. Unfortunately, more incidents like these involving social media will likely arise in the future. We sincerely appreciate your concerns and agree completely that antisemitism has no place on our campuses now or in the future.

We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Carol L. Folt
President



Charles F. Zukoski
Provost and Senior Vice President
for Academic Affairs