

September 12, 2018

President's Waypoint: An Open Letter of Apology

It can't come as a surprise to any of us that some of the same controversies that have stirred campuses across the country have landed in our midst. During the last several months, we have been confronted with significant issues involving, among other things, the intersection of civil rights, gender equity, academic freedom, and free speech. These topics are fraught with challenges because of the understandably strong reactions they provoke. My administrative staff and I have devoted a great deal of time and energy attempting to resolve related matters in ways that honor the essential rights and interests of affected parties and uphold the values of our institution.

Due to the nature of these controversies—where honest and well-intentioned people have sharp differences—it is inevitable that we will face criticism over our handling of these issues. In response, I am the first to admit that we are far from perfect. I am not perfect. Although attempting to give thoughtful consideration before making every decision, I recognize that some actions could be perceived as insensitive, uncaring, or simply wrong. I will admit there were instances over the last several months where we could have moved faster as an institution. I acknowledge this has led to frustration, anger, and loss of trust by some. We are a learning institution – we learn from each other and from our mistakes and are working to make improvements. We are sincerely trying our best to resolve situations that often do not allow clear answers or solutions.

My team and I made statements, took actions, and responded to difficult things over the last several months that have hurt members of our college community. I deeply regret that my actions caused harm – that has never been my intent, and I would never do that. I want to express my deepest apology to the faculty members who have been hurt because of this ordeal. I have so much respect for our faculty, and I have personally witnessed the dedication and excellence in classrooms across this great college. The last thing I would want, or anyone wants, is for any member of our college community to feel unsafe, maligned, or hurt. I apologize for this. Period. No excuse.

Many of you have expressed to me that you are tired of the negativity and want to move forward. I want to help with this by outlining a few key actions the College has taken and will take to address many of the concerns and issues that have been brought up at our College Planning Council, the Academic Senate, the Gender Equity Workgroup, and by individuals across campus:

1. **Title IX.** I have received a significant amount of feedback about our Title IX processes. Many of the issues predate our current Title IX leadership – sometimes going back decades. There have been years of national discourse about Title IX and how colleges and universities handle related claims. Compounding the problem is a shifting policy with new leadership in Washington, D.C. Regardless, SBCC must be more focused and intentional on this important area. As such, I am moving forward with the immediate hiring of a dedicated, full-time Title IX Officer. This is a long time coming at the college and needed for prompt processing of inquiries, claims, and investigations. This position will also be responsible for a robust, campus wide Title IX and Gender Equity education and training plan. I have directed our Human Resources team to begin this recruitment immediately.

2. **Transparency.** There have been a lot of conversations about transparency around campus. It has always been my intent and desire that this institution be as transparent as possible on all college business – both within our campus community and to our broader Santa Barbara community. This dedication requires constant attention. We are always looking for ways to be more transparent and clear about college business. One immediate step we will take is to make publicly available, via our website, the number and status of all of the College’s Title IX inquiries, claims, and investigations. This is above and beyond what is legally required, but it is something that should be clear and known to all.

3. **Personal Safety.** I am proud of the response the College made related to the Thomas Fire and Montecito Mudslides, closing the College as necessary out of an abundance of caution for your safety. We are constantly looking for ways to increase safety. That said, there have been instances over the last several months where members of our college community have expressed concern over their personal safety. I want to state, unequivocally, that the safety of our campus and of you is my top priority. The Fire Service taught me many years ago that protection of life, health, and safety are our primary missions. This applies directly to our work at this College. There have been cases where we may not have “closed the communications loop,” keeping individuals or our college at-large abreast of the actions we have taken. We simply take care of the problem and move on. We will improve that and be sure to close the communication loop. Over the last several months we have had discussions, been involved in training exercises, and sought advice from the Santa Barbara Police Department, Santa Barbara Fire Department, Santa Barbara Sheriff’s Department, Santa Barbara County District Attorney’s office, and many other local public safety leaders on ways we can improve our processes and quickly address any and all cases where safety is a concern. These discussions will continue, and we will strengthen our response and communication to our campus about our actions.

4. **Advisory Committee.** I want to recognize the incredible work and dedication of the Gender Equity Workgroup. This group of participants from a cross-section of the college met over the

course of several meetings to engage in an open dialogue about issues of gender equity and brainstorm action items. This work will continue! I want to honor their work and would like to see the next step of that work be a formal committee that will be charged with developing recommendations on addressing systemic and operational issues that our College faces. I have suggested a President's Action Committee on Gender Equity, but the current committee could certainly continue in its current form if that is what it determines is best. Consistent with this work, the Academic Senate will be considering this week a resolution that calls for a recommendation for a CPC workgroup to “develop recommendations for strategies to respond to language and actions that violate the SBCC vision statement and disrupt the campus community.” I fully support this effort, and I believe some of this can be incorporated into our action plan on gender equity.

5. **Aspen Excellence Funding.** I have directed that \$20,000 of our Aspen Excellence funding be given to the Academic Senate to be spent however it sees fit in researching, training, and developing best practices in balancing academic integrity, free speech, academic freedom, and civility. This is a significant investment, but I believe in the work and members of this body. The first opportunity for this entails sending a faculty team to the Academic Freedom Conference hosted by the FACCC Education Institute and the American Association of University Professors at Berkeley City College. There may also be other opportunities to pursue such as introducing [Deliberative Dialogues](#) to our college community. Many colleges are using Deliberative Dialogues to have productive, difficult conversations about all sorts of interesting controversial topics.

6. **Board of Trustees.** Finally, your Board of Trustees is also very interested and dedicated to taking policy action on helping with gender equity, sexual harassment, and respectful conversation on difficult subjects. At its next regular meeting, the Board will be discussing what direct actions it can take on a policy level to support continued dialogue and action on these issues. I look forward to sharing those with you.

In closing, I welcome continued input on actions we can take to further our goal of creating a more inclusive and supportive college. We can certainly talk during my Open Office Hours, my "First Wednesdays" meetings, or at other occasions around campus. These are challenging times for our College – and across our nation. My hope is that we can move forward with some positive and significant actions. I have had many great conversations across the college. Thank you for these. This work is not easy – but it must continue.

More than ever, I ask that we move "together forward,"