

*Below is a letter sent from President Yao to faculty members in response to correspondence he received regarding the SJP decampment in June. Please click the link below to read the original faculty letter.*

[CSUCI Faculty letter to President Yao](#)

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Dear Colleagues,

I apologize for this delayed response. I've been able to more comprehensively process and reflect on this experience over the past several weeks; I needed that time to provide a thoughtful response grounded in that reflection.

Thank you for your letter in support of SJP. I acknowledge your disappointment and value your advocacy for our students. Parts of your message resonate with me.

I can appreciate that you disagree with my decision to authorize UPD to bring an end to the encampment. At the same time, I remain confident in that decision given the information available to me and the responsibilities I carry. I understand the stance you have taken regarding the encampment and do not expect that my perspective would change it. Nonetheless, I offer my thoughts below, in part to clarify where my understanding of the situation differs from yours, and also with hope that additional information will be helpful in our building shared understanding of a complex situation that I tried for 40 days to resolve without police involvement. It was, in fact, my personal devotion to the importance of student development that made ours one of the longer-standing encampments in the system.

Please know that I see this building of shared understanding as essential work – not because we need to agree, but because our commitments to the First Amendment and to academic freedom require us to value perspectives other than our own. My ask is that you can value my perception as described below, which I offer as invitation to continuing dialogue.

- I must correct your understanding that protestors had less than 24 hours to vacate their encampment. They were informed in writing on Friday, June 21 at 4:35pm that I had revoked my temporary suspension of the Time, Place, and Manner Policy's prohibition against overnight camping. My message on Saturday, June 22 at 7:33pm repeated that message, providing yet another opportunity for voluntary compliance. This means that the encampment became an unlawful assembly at 4:35pm on June 21, yet it remained in place another two nights after my revocation of temporary permission – and despite my repeated assurance that dialogue would continue beyond the encampment. I recognize in hindsight that I had pinned much on my sense of hope, given the consistently collegial tone of SJP leaders' direct communications with me, that the protestors would carry that level of cooperation forward by responding to my revocation of permission to camp by decamping Friday evening.

- SJP leaders' commitment to peaceful assembly, a point of emphasis in your message, was amply demonstrated throughout the time of the encampment. Community members not affiliated with the University who participated in the protest at CSUCI had also been consistently peaceful. I have not questioned this nature of the protest. However, what I had to take into consideration was whether our student leaders could ensure continuing peacefulness if their protest were joined by an influx of individuals as encampments on other campuses were ended. With protestors at some of those encampments having caused significant destruction of university property – and in at least one of them, having physically attacked university employees – my clear priority had to be the safety and well-being of the campus and all its people. This was a possibility that my leadership team and I had to prepare for, as other encampments in Southern California were closed.
- My team and I spent a great deal of time throughout the duration of the encampment, working to ensure such things as safety during major events for protesters, the campus community, and visitors; thoughtful and timely communication with protestors; thoughtful and timely communication with individuals who contacted my office with complaints about the encampment; and unforeseen, quickly developing complications – such as a tattooing fund-raiser for SJP that would have violated state law, county ordinances, and our Time, Place, and Manner Policy. The tattoo event did not happen because of my team's intervention, meaning that no individuals needed to be charged with breaking the law and the artists involved did not jeopardize their license to practice. It would have been a logical move for me to close the encampment at that time, using disregard for campus policy and significant legal risk to the University as my rationale. Instead, I chose to maintain my faith that SJP leaders would meet me in the middle, as they had promised from the beginning (both in direct communication to Chief of Staff Tollefson on May 13 and in their several requests for “negotiations meetings” with me, which clearly imply an expectation of compromise from all parties), and voluntarily decamp. I held high hopes for this outcome given my promise to continue the dialogue beyond the encampment, and because of my acknowledgement that the encampment had served its purpose in initiating that dialogue.
- Please know, I recognize that SJP leaders and I disagree as to whether they were willing to compromise. As our interactions progressed, I began to doubt whether there was any intended “give” in the give and take required of any successful conflict resolution process. Instead, it became clear that movement towards resolution was expected only of me. Without significant progress in working towards a resolution for both sides, my choice was to either let the encampment remain indefinitely or bring it to a close. In light of the contextual elements described above, I stand by my decision for the latter option.
- I agree with Paulo Freire, that “Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do

not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.” I would add that acting dialogically is impossible in the absence of partners who are also willing to engage in a true dialogic. A “negotiation” requested and approached with no intention of meeting somewhere in the middle provides no room at all for shared creation of meaning and understanding. As a side note, I had not previously thought of my experience with SJP leaders as monologic in nature, but thanks to Freire, I now have a better understanding of why my conversations with SJP were frustrating, and for why my ultimate decision to authorize its closure – which required me to abandon hope for a two-way resolution – was so deeply saddening.

Since closing the encampment at 3pm on June 23, I have received many messages – with a fairly even split as to whether the messenger was thankful/complimentary or disappointed/angry. This split is indicative of the very complex nature of the issues involved. I have communicated with Jewish colleagues who abhor Israel’s actions in Gaza and are sympathetic with protestors, even while feeling a profound sense of personal discomfort with the encampment, and I have communicated with pro-Palestinian colleagues who were angry about the encampment’s disruptions to campus operations and their sense of ease on campus. I have communicated with community members who believe, like you, that the encampment should have been able to continue indefinitely as long as it remained peaceful, and I have communicated with those who were angry that the encampment was allowed to exist overnight at all. In short, there is no agreement. I had to make the decision I believed was in the best interests of our University. I hope we agree that all people with differing perspectives have a right to their point of view and that the way forward is through more dialogue and a sincere, shared conviction to find a peaceful middle ground.

Like you, I value the role that students have played in leading social justice efforts in the United States and around the world. I believe that my attempts to engage with SJP leaders in true dialogic spirit were highly consistent with my DEIA values and with my commitment to upholding First Amendment rights and academic freedom. Again, I have no expectation that you will agree. I do hope that you can understand and value my perspective.

Sincerely,  
Richard Yao, Ph.D.  
President

Dear President Yao,

It seems that you have decided that students must end the encampment (led by Students for Justice in Palestine of CSUCI) based on your email last night 6/22/24 at 7:33pm. And, as of today 6/23/24 at 3:15pm, in less than 24 hours, we have also received notice that you have sent in police with riot gear to sweep the encampment. On behalf of several faculty and staff at CI, we were in the process of writing to implore you to please refrain from using any intervention with law enforcement. The students have been extremely peaceful and have kept all lines of communication open with the administration. We believe that our university holds the values of free speech, peaceful demonstration, respect, and dignity, and thus far, these values have been upheld on both sides. We are disappointed in this ultimate decision to use police to force students to leave.

The world is witnessing the horrific genocidal reality in Gaza and so many of us feel helpless and hopeless. But the courageous action led by our students has given us hope and faith that they will keep this world on track. Many of us who sat with students at the encampment have seen how this action uplifted their own spirits and that of the community to create a small corner of deep solidarity and love for humanity. It allowed for students who felt that anger and hopelessness to channel it into a productive, meaningful action. This is something we should continue to encourage. We believe that the outcome of this political protest DID NOT have to end in police intervention.

While the addition of the Palestinian flag in the library and the disclosure of financial investments of our campus was a good beginning, students of the SJPCI coalition are asking for inclusion in future conversations about investments, specifically in corporations that profit from genocide, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and activities that violate fundamental human rights. These conversations are happening nationwide, and we should be no exception. It would go a long way to commit to dates on a calendar where student government leaders and representatives from SJPCI can discuss with administration their concerns and look toward solutions. The fact that students want to be involved in these issues is commendable and truly an education for students to learn about institutional financial ties and how these systems work. Students want to be involved in examining current policies and work toward perhaps changing or adding policies for our campus. This is also commendable that they are making a commitment to do this type of work to make our campus in alignment with DEIA values.

In addition, students are asking for the campus president to address what is happening in the world and across the country on college campuses, to acknowledge the atrocities in Palestine, and the value of student voices that have historically and currently been the root of social change and justice in our society. This type of missive could be a positive statement to bring the

encampment to a hopeful end. Police presence and student reprimand will only undo all the positive work students have engaged in.

We believe that the encampment will probably be one of the most valuable lessons in our students' educational experiences at CI. Once again, we ask that this experience be one of victory for both sides, where we demonstrate how the power of people and unity can bring hope. In the words of Paulo Freire, "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress." It is not too late to attend to the harm and feelings of mistrust and betrayal that will be caused by the unfortunate use of police presence through concretizing student requests for a public letter and their inclusion and involvement in future dialogue.

In community,

Jose Alamillo  
Theresa Avila  
Raquel Baker  
Frank Barajas  
Maricela Becerra Garcia  
John Caravalo  
Nicholas Centino  
Karina Chavarria  
Jose Luis Collazo  
Nancy Deans  
Lydia Dixon  
Georgina Guzman  
Sebastián Hunt  
Hanni Jalil  
Susan Lefevre  
Jennie Luna  
Kendall McClellan  
Raul Moreno Campos  
Lindsey O'Connor  
Julia Ornelas-Higdon  
Pilar Pacheco  
Monica Pereira  
Mari Riojas-Cortez  
Vicente Rubacalva  
Ariel Vaughn  
Brittnee Veldman  
Elizabeth Villa  
Cindy Wyels  
Greg Wood

**Jennie Luna, Ph.D.**

(Xicana Caxcan Nahua)

Associate Professor Chicana/o Studies

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CSU Channel Islands is situated on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Chumash Nation

She, Her/s, Ella

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Spring 2024 Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 12-2pm and by appointment

Zoom Office Hours available Mondays 12-2pm: <https://csuci.zoom.us/j/85483633403>



CONTINUING OUR COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS, COMMUNITY, SCHOLARSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE SINCE 2008

*"If you want to know who you are and where you come from, follow the maíz."*

*-Roberto "Cintli" Rodríguez*

Raza Resource Guide for CI Students:

