Subject: Supporting Our Students and Community Through Challenging Times
Date: Tuesday, March 18, 2025 at 12:16:36 PM Pacific Daylight Time
From: Office of the President
To: Christine Paik

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Dear CSUSM colleagues,

As we move through the spring semester, I want to take a moment to address several important topics that I know are on the minds of many in our campus community — from recent federal actions impacting higher education, to questions around free speech and campus protests, to the ongoing safety and care for our students, faculty and staff.

I also know that in this time — when so much is happening so quickly — it can create real stress, concern, and raise many questions across our university community. There will no doubt be different perspectives on how to respond to everything that is coming at us. And I know that part of what makes this moment difficult is the uncertainty and not always knowing how these shifting dynamics will affect us. Chaos and confusion can easily divide, but I know we are stronger when we work together.

What I want to say clearly is that our CSUSM values remain unchanged: educating and caring for our students remains our top priority. We remain committed to supporting our students and each other, and we will navigate these challenges together — grounded in our mission and who we are as a university. To give us the opportunity to share information and work together, we are creating spaces for dialogue that I hope will fortify us as a community as we move forward.

Community Dialogues

We will be hosting a series of **In-Person Community Dialogues** on topics affecting higher education, as they relate to our campus.

The first campus community dialogue opportunity will focus on support for all students, including those from vulnerable or marginalized communities; the second will address the Dear Colleague letter and impacts on federal grants; and the third will center on free speech. Each session will begin with updates on the work currently underway, followed by table dialogues on how we move forward together — grounded in our values and focused on our mission.

The first session, focused on CSUSM's support for all students will be:

- for **staff/MPPs** on **March 27 from 10-11:30 a.m.**, and
- for **faculty** on **March 27 from noon-1:30 p.m.**

RSVP is required here

The sessions on the additional topics will follow in April.

In the meantime, I want to take a moment to speak directly to these topics and share my heart with you.

Care for Students

I want to acknowledge that for many of our staff, faculty and students, these have been challenging and uncertain times. Not a day goes by where I am not thinking of and working for the safety and well-being of our people. There may be disagreements on how to respond to the challenges we face, but let us not doubt that we all have the same goal – the safety of our community. I know I speak for more than just myself when I say we remain steadfast in supporting all members of our campus community, including those from vulnerable and marginalized communities and groups that may feel particularly impacted by national and global events. The unwavering, nonstop dedication and action on behalf of those affected has not gone unnoticed; I want to commend staff, faculty and administrators across the university who have been hard at work, each and every day, ensuring that resources and education continue to be provided to those who need it most.

Free Speech

Over the past several weeks, I've heard questions and concerns from some of you regarding a protest that occurred on our campus in February. I have been asked: *"Why would we hold students accountable for exercising their free speech rights?"* and *"Does this mean we no longer stand for free speech at CSUSM?"*

We stand firmly for free speech, free expression and academic freedom — these are essential principles to our institution. And part of supporting free speech means protecting *everyone's* right to express themselves — including ensuring that students, faculty and invited speakers can share their views without being silenced, disrupted or intimidated. If protests disrupt or interfere with the free speech and safety of others, rules and laws exist to ensure that everyone's rights are protected. Our conduct process is developmental, follows due process and does not predetermine outcomes. It's not about silencing voices – it's about protecting and respecting all voices.

Federal Impacts

We are also closely monitoring recent federal developments, including the Dear

Colleague Letter from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights as well as proposed changes to federal funding for grants and contracts. While many of these federal actions are being challenged in the courts, these changes could have implications for our students, faculty and staff — especially as it relates to research and support services. Our leadership team is working diligently with the Chancellor's Office, higher education partners, and state and federal policymakers, to analyze potential impacts, find alternative solutions and to advocate for the needs of our university community and against drastic budget cuts at the federal and state levels.

Finally, I want to express my deep gratitude to each of you. The compassion, dedication and care you show to our students and to each other are what make CSUSM such a special place. Please continue to look out for one another, and don't hesitate to seek support if you need it. I look forward to the continued conversations ahead.

With care and appreciation,

Ellen