

December 20, 2023

Resolution to Censure
San Antonio College (SAC) President Dr. Naydeen González–DeJesús
and
Vice President of Academic Success (VPAS) Dr. Cassandra Rincones

We, the SAC Faculty Senate, value our relationship with the SAC administration and regard shared governance as a vital component of our institution. One aspect of this structure is constructive collaboration. This resolution is an effort to restore the relationship between faculty and the Senior Executive Team (SET).

We stand by faculty because they represent an integral part of SAC. The [Maricopa Community Colleges “Academic Freedom” statement](#) captures the importance of higher education faculty: “Because of their role in the classroom, their close contact with students, their knowledge of the tools and resources necessary to provide instruction, and their training as experts in their fields, faculty have a unique role in the institution’s mission. As such, faculty should not be disciplined for requesting a voice in institutional policy, for criticizing trustees or administration, or for voicing an opinion pertaining to the actions or policies of their institutions.” We respectfully request this same consideration from our administration.

We also hold an expectation of all SAC employees, ourselves included, to maintain clear and honest communication between students, faculty, staff, and administration. In the spirit of restorative justice and Compassionate USA commitments, we maintain grace for mistakes that are acknowledged with the sincere intention of growth and betterment. We ask for serious consideration and discussion of our below resolutions.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Whereas we, the SAC Faculty Senate, as representatives of the faculty, wholly support the academic freedom of faculty and students to engage in the exploration of academic fields, from cutting edge scientific studies to historical and current events;

Whereas we broadly condemn intimidation or coercion to suppress good faith exploration and discussion, especially when the topic pertains to an academic specialty of the faculty and their courses, and when the format follows Alamo Colleges District (ACD) policy, the [TX Education Code Section 51.9315 \(h\)\(1\)\(A-D\)](#), which states that “an institution of higher education may consider only content-neutral and viewpoint-neutral criteria related to the needs of [an] event,” and [TX Education Code Section 51.9315 \(h\)\(2\)](#), which states that “an institution of higher education may not consider any anticipated controversy related to the event;”

Whereas on October 23, 2023, Dr. Naydeen González-DeJesús and other members of SET interfered with an educational event organized primarily by faculty, titled “Teach-in for Palestine”, out of concerns for controversy;

HUMAN RESOURCES INVESTIGATIONS

Whereas on October 24, 2023, the four organizers of the “Teach-in for Palestine” (later renamed “Palestine 101”), complied with a request made by San Antonio College President Dr. Naydeen González-DeJesús to postpone this event. One of the organizers announced the postponement to the audience, who had arrived at NAHC 218 thinking the Teach-in was still taking place. The audience included Dr. Cassandra Rincones, Vice President of Academic Success (VPAS);

Whereas on the days of October 26 and 27, 2023, two of the event organizers, referred to here as Employee A and Employee B, were called into separate meetings with a SAC HR partner, referred to here as HR Rep 1 and Dr. Rincones. According to statements and emails provided by both employees, no meeting explanation was provided in advance and both were initially denied their requests to have their chairs present (which was later amended ahead of the meeting). These meetings opened with Dr. Rincones accusing Employees A and B of acting disrespectfully, unprofessionally, and insubordinately. Employee A reported that they were told by Dr. Rincones that they were being investigated for possible placement on **Step 3 - Progressive Discipline**, one step from termination. Both investigations began unfairly and unethically, as they opened with accusations and their accuser, Dr. Rincones, leading the discussion instead of HR Rep 1. Neither employee was allowed an opportunity to share their full side of the story before these accusations were levied. Neither employee felt that their questions or concerns, including those of potential anti-Palestinian bias, during those initial meetings were fully addressed;

Whereas HR Rep 1, along with another HR partner, met with Employee A and Employee B in separate meetings on 10/31/2023 to hear their accounts of events surrounding the Teach-in for Palestine. Both employees later received individual emails confirming that the HR investigations of insubordination were “unsubstantiated” and that HR did “not recommend any corrective action.” This email noted that Dr. Rincones supported dropping the HR investigation;

SUMMARY

The methods by which HR investigations were recently conducted at our campus — not informing faculty members of the purpose of an HR meeting, not allowing faculty to offer their version of events to HR without administrators present, and initially denying a request for a chairperson to accompany a faculty member — lack transparency and fairness. The intimidation generated in these scenarios creates a fearful workplace and if continued can

severely undermine academic freedom. It should be noted that tenured and non-tenured faculty have both faced these types of tactics over the years, demonstrating little respect for faculty rights, whether faculty are new or long established. These investigations arrived immediately following several years of reports to faculty senators of dubious disciplinary practices (including at least three reports of being told to sign a Step 3: Progressive Discipline document or risk termination). This toxic history that our new administration inherited needs to be rectified rather than continued, and we hope to see them enact changes that end coercive practices and ensure due process.

Most troubling are the changing narratives, multiple contradictions, and lack of accountability by some members of the SET about their respective involvement in the mishandling of the “Teach-in for Palestine” event and suppressing academic freedom. There have now been several narratives relayed to the faculty (e.g. “Teach-in” is unclear, offensive, and insensitive; “Teach-in for Palestine” is insensitive and offensive; miscommunication of the college president’s approval of the event; and now lack of compensation paperwork) offered on why the event was originally cancelled. The planning committee organizers confirmed that the “Teach-in for Palestine” guest speaker neither asked to be paid nor did the Teach-in for Palestine planning committee ask for any department or program to pay the guest speaker a fee for this event. If such a compensation request was the impetus for the cancellation/postponement, it was based on a misunderstood communication between administrators and their teams, and that concern should have been verified before acting.

It is important to acknowledge too that students and staff who spoke up or supported the organizers and the larger planning committee of the “Teach-in for Palestine” likewise reported being subjected to intimidation and/or questionable reprimands.

Overall, these events have spurred a distrust of the SET; heavily demoralized the “Teach-in for Palestine” planning committee organizers, members, and supporters; and reopened old wounds inflicted on faculty who have previously been subjected to unfair disciplinary actions or HR investigations.

URGENT RESOLUTIONS

We, the SAC Faculty Senate, express deep disapproval, or **censure**, of Dr. González-DeJesús’ and Dr. Rincones’ actions surrounding the Teach-in event, and

Resolve that as the [SAC 2022-2025 Strategic Plan](#) states in “Strategic Priority 2: Principle-Centered Leadership, Goal 2,” our administration needs to remain committed to “provid[ing] employee engagement, development, and empowerment, which leads to a best place to work environment.” We request a written statement explaining how the SET will address each of our resolutions within a month’s time (30 days) of receiving our resolution.

Resolve that college administrators must adhere to TX Education Code Section 51.9315 (h)(1)(A-D) and (h)(2). We ask that the SET publicly recognize the importance of following the law and that academic freedom is a “special concern of the First Amendment.” We remind our administration that TX Education Code Section 51.9315 Protected Expression on Campus acknowledges that events held in an academic environment may focus a lens on a singular viewpoint and do not necessitate an opposing viewpoint be presented. We have a long-established precedence for amplifying voices of minority and oppressed groups that never required a counterpoint, even when honorariums have been provided (as with panels held during the SAC 2023 Women's History Month: “Bigger than Roe” events.) This aligns with TX Education Code Section 51.9315(h)(1) which states that *the approval* for such events should have only “content-neutral and viewpoint-neutral” criteria and does not stipulate that the event or speakers themselves be neutral. Furthermore, subsection 51.9315(h)(2) specifically declares that anticipated controversy should not be a deciding factor for the approval of events.

Resolve that intimidation and discrimination have no place in any workplace and not a community college where there are people from various countries and cultures, and we call for the SET to participate in annual trainings in unconscious bias, ethical leadership styles, and compassionate communication.

Resolve that SAC needs to establish education weeks in which the experiences of underrepresented Indigenous groups are highlighted; in particular, we request the establishment of a Palestinian Education Week so that the voices of this vastly underrepresented Indigenous group, which has been much maligned in academia and generally, be heard, understood, and appreciated.

Resolve that HR should not be invoked by our administration for intimidation purposes. As such, we request written policies on HR’s exact role and step-by-step procedures in managing disputes between faculty and the SET to ensure all parties involved in such disputes understand that HR representatives do not simply side with the SET because of their higher status and greater power. Plainly said, we need assurance of faculty due process in any HR investigations.

Resolve that an Ombudsperson who will act as a neutral third-party should be hired by fall 2024. This person should not only meet with the SET regularly but also with the Faculty and Staff Senates regularly to ensure that this employee understand their role is to be unbiased and serve all faculty, staff, and administrators and not simply carry out the order of anyone on the SET. If this hire is not possible, then at the very least, we call for academic experts familiar with SAC, like Claudia García-Louis, a UTSA professor who conducted an in-depth landscape analysis of SAC right before the pandemic, to be consulted on how to create a respectful and accountable shared governance model moving forward.

Resolve that Dr. Naydeen González-DeJesús and Dr. Cassandra Rincones should both send written apologies to the Teach-in for Palestine organizers and that these letters of apology be placed into their HR personnel file should they so wish.

Resolve that the SET needs to meet with Faculty and Staff Senates, in sessions open to all faculty and staff, respectively, in listening sessions occurring once per 16-week semester.

It is only once the SET has addressed these resolutions and shown a commitment to fundamental change through shared governance that we can move forward together, begin to renew trust, and perhaps, as is our hope, truly be a SAC family. We reluctantly issue this resolution, but we do so because we care deeply about SAC.

While we are deeply disappointed in the recent actions of Dr. González-DeJesús and Dr. Rincones, we continue to have abundant faith in our students' potential and success and in the SAC faculty's commitment to serving our students and the wider San Antonio community. When ACD joined the Compassionate USA initiative in summer 2023, we discovered that this online micro-course helps us better learn how to "treat others as one wants to be treated." We humbly and respectfully seek a fresh start with the SET that honors the above resolutions and this spirit of compassion.

Approved by a 17:0 vote of the Faculty Senate during our 12/8/2023 meeting, 6 absent or abstained.