

December 11, 2023

Dear President Hartzell,

We write to you as faculty located in departments and colleges across the University of Texas at Austin. We are deeply concerned about the repression of free speech and the safety of students and instructors on our campus, which is becoming increasingly hostile to anyone demonstrating support for the Palestinian people who are facing mass displacement and [genocide](#). We write in recognition that what is occurring at UT Austin is emblematic of a broader national attack on those who criticize Israel's military actions, call for a ceasefire, or express solidarity with Palestinians. Across the country, students and faculty have been [doxxed](#), [censured](#), [sanctioned](#) or [fired](#) while lectures, conferences, and other educational events have been [canceled](#).

We were distressed to learn that on November 22nd Steve Hicks School of Social Work Dean Allan Cole [summarily dismissed](#) graduate Teaching Assistants Parham Daghighi and Callie Kennedy in retaliation for sending a [message to students](#) acknowledging the “mental health implications” of the violence in Gaza and the University's silence on student suffering, and directing them to mental health resources on and off campus. Daghighi and Kennedy's message was sent with the approval of the course professor, to a class focused on mental health, in response to a student's request for support and acknowledgement. Although Dean Cole has said Daghighi and Kennedy will be employed in some capacity next semester, his decision—which the University has [publicly supported](#)—to relieve Daghighi and Kennedy of their teaching duties and prevent their return to teaching next semester is evidence of an attempt to censor their voices and sends an intimidating message to other students and instructors on campus.

Daghighi and Kennedy's suspension is part of a pattern of silencing and erasure of pro-Palestinian students on our campus. We have heard firsthand reports that UT Austin administrators have verbally reprimanded student government leaders for re-posting pro-Palestinian content from registered and sponsored UT student organizations on social media even though re-posting in this manner is an ordinary practice. Meanwhile, UT administrators have failed to meaningfully act on the intimidation and threats Palestinian students and their allies have faced on and offline. In your October 17th message to the UT Austin community you stated that you “have zero tolerance for the antisemitic actions targeting our Jewish community or the hate-filled actions targeting our Palestinian and Muslim communities.” However, you have still not publicly condemned or even acknowledged the harassment students faced from outside agitators at a teach-in organized by the Palestine

Solidarity Committee [on October 12th](#) in Welch Hall despite mass requests for you to do so. This suggests that Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and allied students' safety and well-being are not in fact a priority for your administration.

We appreciate your promise in your October 13th message to “protect everyone’s right to free speech,” but your public statements and silences since then imply that only speech supporting Israel’s military action is protected at UT Austin. As you noted in your October 17th message, “calls for the elimination of a people, deserve to be condemned and have absolutely no moral defense,” yet you have not yet commented on calls for the elimination of the people of Gaza coming from political leaders in the [United States](#) and [Israel](#); the deaths of more than [15,000 Palestinians](#), including more than 5,000 children, since October 7th; the ongoing forced displacement and collective punishment of over 1 million Gazans; or Israel’s blockade of food, water, fuel and electricity in [defiance of international humanitarian law](#)—which are but some of the atrocities that have been widely condemned by [civil society organizations](#), [scholars of genocide](#) and [international humanitarian organizations](#). This double standard contributes to a chilling effect on members of our campus community and concern that your administration does not support those who might condemn Israel's actions.

We support and echo the demands of the [Palestine Solidarity Committee](#), and call on you to:

1. Reinstate Parham Daghighi and Callie Kennedy as teaching assistants and issue a public apology to them
2. Express equal support for Palestinian and Jewish members of our community who are profoundly suffering, and provide material support to safeguard Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and all students who have been made to feel unsafe and unwelcome on our campus
3. Establish a clear policy indicating that retaliatory actions in response to instructors’ and students’ right to free speech will not be tolerated at our university

This political moment poses a threat to the democratic mission of higher education not seen since the McCarthy era. We call on you, as our appointed leader, to rise to this challenging occasion and uphold the academic values of learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, opportunity, and responsibility the University of Texas at Austin has long represented.

Sincerely,

1. Karma R. Chávez, Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies
2. Lauren Gutterman, Department of American Studies

3. Pavithra Vasudevan, Departments of African and African Diaspora Studies & Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies
4. Kamran Asdar Ali, Department of Anthropology
5. Annette M. Rodríguez, Department of History
6. Vox Jo Hsu, Department of Rhetoric and Writing, Center for Asian American Studies, & Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies
7. Luis Cárcamo-Huechante, Department of Spanish and Portuguese & Program in Native American and Indigenous Studies
8. Stacey Sowards, Department of Communication Studies
9. Laura Gutiérrez, Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies
10. Sharmila Rudrappa, Department of Sociology
11. Maria Cotera, Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies
12. Lisa L. Moore, Departments of English & Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies
13. Annie Hill, Department of Rhetoric and Writing
14. Ashley D. Farmer, Departments of History & African and African Diaspora Studies
15. Roger Reeves, Department of English
16. Ashanté Reese, Department of African and African Diaspora Studies
17. Iokepa Casumbal-Salazar, Department of Anthropology
18. Snehal Patel, Department of Internal Medicine and Department of Health Social Work
19. Jennifer Wilks, Departments of English & African and African Diaspora Studies, Program in Comparative Literature
20. Danielle Clealand, Departments of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies and African and African Diaspora Studies
21. Christen Smith, Departments of African and African Diaspora Studies & Anthropology
22. Angela Valenzuela, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy
23. Alison Kafer, Departments of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
24. Shiv Ganesh, Department of Communication Studies
25. Craig Campbell, Department of Anthropology & Program in Native American and Indigenous Studies
26. Alex Beasley, Department of American Studies
27. Ward Keeler, Department of Anthropology
28. Anonymous
29. Iván Chaar López, Department of American Studies
30. Aaron Aceves, Department of English
31. Laurel Mei-Singh, Department of Geography and Environment and Center for Asian American Studies
32. Gloria González-López, Department of Sociology
33. Ammar Ahmed, Department of Internal Medicine

34. Sofian Merabet, Department of Anthropology
35. Rebecca Falkoff, Department of French and Italian
36. Lyndon K. Gill, Departments of African & African Diaspora Studies, Anthropology, Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies
37. Neville Hoad, Department of English
38. Omar Iqbal, Department of Neurosurgery
39. Bassam Sidiki, Department of English
40. Jossianna Arroyo-Martinez, Department of Spanish and Portuguese and African and African Diaspora Studies
41. Kelly McDonough, Department of Spanish and Portuguese & Program in Native American and Indigenous Studies
42. Lina Chhun, Department of American Studies, Center for Asian American Studies, & Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies
43. Hector Dominguez Ruvalcaba, Department of Spanish & Portuguese
44. Julie Minich, Departments of English and Mexican American & Latina/o Studies
45. Yasmiyn Irizarry, Department of African and African Diaspora Studies
46. E. Cizek, School of Advertising and Public Relations
47. Jennifer Chang, English Department
48. Circe Sturm, Department of Anthropology and Program in Native American and Indigenous Studies
49. Joan Neuberger, Professor Emerita, Department of History
50. Thomas Jesús Garza, Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies
51. Anonymous, Dell Medical School
52. Bedour Alagraa, Department of African and African Diaspora Studies
53. Andrew Dell'Antonio, Butler School of Music
54. Adewole Adamson, Departments of Internal Medicine & African and African Diaspora Studies
55. Harry Cleaver, Associate Professor of Economics, Emeritus
56. Anonymous
57. Anonymous
58. Caroline Faria, Department of Geography and the Environment & Plan II honors
59. Anonymous, Steve Hicks School of Social Work
60. Thomas Jesús Garza, Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies
61. Anonymous, UT Libraries
62. Mary Elizabeth Ibarrola, Department of Anthropology
63. Mónica A. Jiménez, Department of African and African Diaspora Studies
64. Steven Seegel, Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies
65. Anonymous

66. Celina de Sá, Department of Anthropology
67. John Hartigan, Department of Anthropology
68. Noah De Lissovoy, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
69. Anonymous
70. Anthony K Webster, Department of Anthropology
71. Anne Lewis, Department of Radio-Television-Film
72. PJ Raval, Department of Radio-TV-Film
73. Sarah Mills, Department of Internal Medicine
74. Courtney Handman, Department of Anthropology
75. Sonia Roncador, Department of Spanish and Portuguese
76. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Department of English and Center for Asian American Studies
77. Heather Jones, Steve Hicks School of Social Work
78. Jennifer McClearn, Department of Radio-Television-Film
79. Vladislav Beronja, Slavic and Eurasian Studies
80. Ya'Ke Smith, Radio-TV-Film Department
81. Anonymous
82. Anonymous, College of Liberal Arts
83. Deborah Parra-Medina, Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies
84. Amelia Acker, School of Information
85. Cristin Stephens, Radio-TV-Film Department
86. Anonymous, Steve Hicks School of Social Work
87. Rhiannon Hamam, School of Law
88. Rachel Gonzalez-Martin, Mexican American & Latina/o Studies
89. Cary Cordova, Department of American Studies
90. Anonymous, Mexican American and Latina/o Studies and WGSS
91. Paola Canova, Department of Anthropology
92. Donnie Johnson Sackey, Department of Rhetoric & Writing
93. Janet Staiger, Professor Emeritus, Radio-Television-Film and Women's and Gender Studies
94. Anonymous, Department of Radio-Television-Film
95. Luis Urrieta, Department of Curriculum & Instruction & Native American & Indigenous Studies Program
96. Anonymous
97. Helena Woodard, Departments of English, African and African Diaspora Studies, and Faculty Affiliate, Comparative Literature
98. Anonymous, College of Education
99. Abimbola Adelakun, African/African Diaspora Studies

100. Pauline Strong, Department of Anthropology and Program in Native American and Indigenous Studies
101. Jennifer Ebbeler, Department of Classics
102. Curran Nault, Department of Radio-TV-Film
103. Anonymous
104. Mary Beltrán, Department of Radio-Television-Film
105. Anonymous, College of Liberal Arts
106. Anonymous
107. J. Brent Crosson, Religious Studies
108. Miriam Solis, Community & Regional Planning
109. Anonymous, UT School of Law
110. Elias Saqan, Cockrell School of Engineering
111. Anonymous