



September 16, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your letter, and for your dedication as USC faculty. We work every day to uphold the University's mission and we stand united for a better and more inclusive USC. I sincerely appreciate your reaching out to ensure the continued stand of USC against hatred in all forms.

President Folt, in her [letter to the USC community](#) on August 6, unequivocally affirmed that anti-Semitism in all of its forms is a profound betrayal of our principles and has no place at the University. Winston Crisp, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Varun Soni, Vice Provost for Campus Wellness and Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life, shared a powerful and supportive message with our students on [August 24](#), reminding them of their responsibilities and encouraging civility and respect in the difficult conversations we will be having all semester and into the future.

As you may know, Vice President Crisp stopped the impeachment hearings against Rose Ritch. The impeachment focused on Rose's alleged silence concerning claims that her running mate had made racially insensitive comments. Her running mate, Truman Fitz, who went on to be the President of Undergraduate Student Government, has since apologized and stepped down. Rose was subjected to much bullying and harassment on social media and attacks on her Jewish and Zionist identities, even though that was not the stated reason for the impeachment. As the situation began to escalate on social media, Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian postings appeared as well. Several of us in university leadership spoke to Rose and hoped she would stay on in student government. In the end, she decided on her own that it would be best for her to resign. We supported her throughout this process and respect her decision.

During the course of looking into how USC's Undergraduate Student Government (USG) functions, we found a history of underlying issues, most of which stem from poor processes embedded in USG's Undergraduate Student Government by-laws.

To strengthen our leadership in these matters, President Folt and I have taken many steps to further educate ourselves and our community. This included conversations with representatives from USC Hillel, the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, and Hebrew Union College, as well as other campus leaders, faculty, and students. All of these conversations have led to a better understanding of the experience of Jewish students, staff, and faculty here at USC.

Online harassment and bullying have become a platform for hate speech. It is not possible for the University to monitor all the social media posts nor can we even authenticate the sources. This medium can distort the truth, lead to a great deal of misinformation, and enflame and magnify situations beyond a rational discourse.

Dean Soni will convene a group of faculty experts this semester to help us build a framework to be more effective at addressing anti-Semitism and other forms of identity-based discrimination. We will, as you wrote, foster "excellence in education and advancing knowledge in a civil and respectful manner." Progress cannot be made if vitriol and ignorance are allowed to control the conversations. To move forward collectively, we must embrace and welcome a diversity of opinions, backgrounds, and identities. Creating the capacity for these discussions is why we come together at a great research university.

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The University of Southern California explicitly stands against anti-Semitism in all its forms—outright, violent, coded, and subtle. We stand against all forms of online bullying, such as what we saw this past summer. We will further continue to make safe spaces for all our communities to be heard. We unequivocally support academic freedom and expansive free speech, and we do not punish faculty, students, or staff for constitutionally-protected speech.

I thank you again for your service to our diverse and vibrant community. Your leadership and grace are needed now more than ever.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charles Zukoski". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Charles F. Zukoski
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs