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May 13, 2024

Subject: Free Speech at TAMU-CC

Dear President Miller and Members of President's Cabinet:

The Executive Committee at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) is writing to express serious concerns about the reports and documented instances of apparent student endangerment, theft, and harassment. These incidents occurred during a peaceful protest staged by students, faculty, and community members from the Corpus Christi Palestinian Solidarity Community from April 25-May 7. During their protest, they experienced various forms of harassment and intimidation, including a university student's threat of violence and theft of demonstrators' property.

We call on the university administration to take concrete action in response to the events detailed below and communicate their response to the university community.

The Corpus Christi Palestinian Solidarity Community documents their experiences on their public instagram (cctxpsc), and a brief overview of the events is as follows:

On April 25, students, faculty, and community members from the Corpus Christi Palestinian Solidarity Community began a peaceful protest to raise awareness on TAMU-CC's campus about the ongoing conflict in Gaza. Their protest was located in a common outdoor area at the intersection of Island Boulevard and Ocean Drive. In preparation for their protest, the group developed a protocol for de-escalation and peaceful engagement with potential counter-protestors. They also spoke with representatives from the University Police Department (UPD), who reassured them of their right to protest as well as their right to protest in their chosen location. Their protest continued until May 7, and it concluded with a march on campus.

On May 1, a student approached their encampment from campus, pulled out a knife, and while he called a demonstrator the slur "terrorists," he cut down a banner, attempted to steal it, and stole a flag. Subsequently, he ran back to campus toward the Harte Research Institute. Later, he was driven by the protest, and he waved the flag he stole from the protest in their direction. The protesters filed a complaint immediately with UPD; however, they state that the report was not submitted to other university compliance offices until May 6. The Title IX office is also refusing to allow the main witness to file the report anonymously.

Shortly after the incident on May 1, four Corpus Christi police officers and two undercover cars approached the protest to ask them to remove a banner, and the protestors complied. During their time protesting, the group reports various such incidents of harassment or intimidation, which infringed on their freedom of speech rights. These incidents included being subjected to slurs, being called terrorists, people blasting train horns late at night, and other encounters with

individuals or campus religious groups they found to be attempting to intimidate and/or harass, be threatening or excessively surveillant. UPD's and CCPD's approach to these matters suggests a posture of intimidation toward the demonstrating students and leniency toward alleged aggressors.

On May 2, President Miller emailed the university community a memorandum on "Campus Safety and Freedom of Expression." This memorandum reiterated the University's commitment to "fostering a safe and respectful environment here at the Island University." The above timeline of events suggests a number of [student code of conduct](#) violations, not limited to: endangerment, theft, and harassment. This message did not mention the real dangers current students faced the days before this message or any concrete actions the university planned to take to redress those dangers.

As members of the TAMU-CC faculty, we are deeply concerned for the physical and emotional wellbeing of our students.

As members of the AAUP, interested in defending principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression on campus, we are concerned that some speech is protected more vigorously than other speech.

We request the following concrete actions be taken:

- 1) Expedite the investigation of the student who directly intimidated the protestors, violating TAMU-CC's [Student Code of Conduct](#) and [Expressive Activity on Campus policy](#)
- 2) Investigate other potential violations of TAMU-CC's [Expressive Activity on Campus policy](#)
- 3) Meet with the group to dialogue about their concerns regarding full disclosure to the campus community about the university's investments and potential divestment.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kelly L. Bezio, President AAUP, TAMU-CC Chapter

Dr. Allie Kelley, Vice President AAUP, TAMU-CC Chapter

Dr. Timothy Scott Johnson, Secretary-Treasurer AAUP, TAMU-CC Chapter



The AAUP principles on academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance are widely regarded by faculty, college and university administrations, and governing boards alike as the gold standards of higher education. These principles were jointly formulated by organizations representing college and university presidents as well as the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.