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AS STATEMENT REGARDING CAMPUS AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POST OF CLASSROOM EXCHANGE

Date Passed: May 19, 2021

Dear district and campus community,

As the academic year draws to a close, the leadership of Cypress College Associated Students (AS) prepares to transition to our newly elected council. As this final week of the semester is the last opportunity for the current council to officially address the campus and district communities, we believe it is necessary to make one last statement regarding the current state of our institution.

First and foremost, our council is extremely proud of our fellow Chargers completing another semester at our college and especially those who are graduating. We extend our sincere congratulations to these individuals achieving these incredible scholarly milestones. While this academic year was extremely difficult for our campus community in the midst of a pandemic, the perseverance demonstrated by our students is especially admirable.

This AS council has been honored to represent and serve our fellow students during a year of national civil unrest, a widespread movement advocating for long-overdue racial justice, and the global COVID-19 crisis. We have had the pleasure of working with countless extraordinary individuals throughout our campus and district communities to help foster positive academic environments, support initiatives that advance the core values of our institution, and help shape the future of Cypress College. The torch of student leadership is about to be passed to our council-elect and we are incredibly eager to see where they lead our Charger community in the coming year.

Although we hope the accomplishments of our students remain the subject of focus this week above all else, time is a pressing factor regarding separate matters. It is well-known that several weeks ago, a short video clip of an exchange between an instructor and a student at our college within a virtual class setting was posted on social media. This exchange, as well as the response of our college's administration to the video, became the subjects of significant controversy and criticism. Since then, there has been much pressure on AS to take a firm and active stance on these matters; however, new information and perspectives regarding the incident were regularly emerging and continue to do so. As our current AS council members approach the end of their terms, we believe we must comment on where we stand on the current state of affairs, regardless of how much information about the situation has been made available.

As the investigation is ongoing, AS will continue to closely monitor the trying circumstances our campus and district communities are facing. Our current AS council and the AS council-elect continue to have extensive conversations regarding these concerning issues and actively discuss new information and developments as we receive them. The current AS council believes it would be irresponsible to take any absolute position on these matters or perceive the situation as a binary issue when we do not have a comprehensive understanding of the full event; however, this is not to say we are unconcerned with the recent events that have placed our campus in a questionable public spotlight. In response to this, we will express our sentiments and assert our values accordingly.

We affirm the imperative for academic environments to allow for a diverse array of ideas and opinions from both students and instructors. We affirm the right and responsibility of instructors to foster constructive and respectful academic discourse, as well as their right to use atypical teaching methods to do so effectively. We strongly encourage the North Orange County Community College District to conduct a thorough review of policies pertaining to the recording of classes, include student representation in these review processes, and amend these policies accordingly in order to preserve the character, integrity, and safety of students and instructors.

Apart from the event itself, AS is aware that many of our students, staff, and faculty, including the instructor involved in the exchange in question, have been targeted with an onslaught of communications bearing hateful, personal attacks spurred by the released video. We unequivocally denounce this hateful rhetoric and sincerely appreciate the vigilance of our administration, Academic Computing, Campus Safety, and local law enforcement who work tirelessly to preserve the well-being of our campus community. We ask our campus and district to maintain their attentive security efforts and offer additional support for any member of our campus or district community who has been affected by the reactionary harm inflicted by malicious parties.

We also must make it clear that the "NOCCCD Student Coalition," as identified by the press and during public comment of the NOCCCD Board of Trustees meeting on Tuesday, May 11, 2021, is not an official student organization sanctioned by our Cypress College Inter-Club Council, nor has any attempt been made to establish this group as an officially sanctioned student organization on our campus. AS is not aware of any constituent governance group at our institution that recognizes this group's legitimacy. Furthermore, AS does not currently recognize or affiliate itself with this group, as we believe doing so would implicitly subvert the system of fair student representation which we have been elected and appointed to preserve and serve. This clarification is not a denunciation of any of our fellow students nor their respective opinions, but rather a reaffirmation that AS has a responsibility to operate within the purview established by our governing documents.

AS upholds and supports the right of students to exercise free speech and convey any relevant concerns to their college or district. We also fully realize that our elected members have been designated by the student body to execute specific governing duties and represent them appropriately and effectively in all capacities allowed. AS takes pride in fulfilling these responsibilities and will continue to do so while also respecting the right of students to express their opinions and calls for action. We are disappointed by the fact that this situation has been extremely politicized by some campus and district community members, countless angered social media users, and within the press; however, considering the social and political climate of our country, we also understand that this outcome was likely inevitable.

Regardless of how impassioned certain perspectives may be, AS remains in pursuit of the truth and a fair resolution to these unfortunate circumstances. We are aware that the college's administrative response to the initial outcry has come under criticism, that there is concern from faculty members of our college who feel their academic freedom has been jeopardized, and that many of our fellow students remain confused about the situation. Overlooking any of these points would discredit the sentiments of many affected and concerned individuals; however, our current council does not have the ability to pass any judgment on these matters as there is an ongoing investigation at the present time and it seems likely we do not have all the concrete facts regarding the events in question. This statement has been made with the expectation that when the new AS council takes office in the coming weeks, they will continue to assess the situation as it develops and release any additional statements when necessary.

We sincerely appreciate the resilience of our campus community during this difficult time for our college. As the elected representatives of our fellow students, this council will end this academic year with great optimism, and justifiably so. We all continue to endure this tumultuous era in our nation's history, but to us, Cypress College is a unique institution that provides countless opportunities for students to thrive and imparts us with the ability and confidence to make our world a better place. Even in a virtual format, Cypress College remains a welcoming institution in which we foster academic success, personal and professional growth, and the advancement of our core values of excellence, equity, integrity, collegiality, and inclusiveness. These goals are what unify us, and although that unity might be shaken, it is anything but broken. We say this as a diverse group of student leaders who are proud of our institution and while we wish the very best of success to those leaving our home with new degrees and achievements to their names, we also welcome the incoming class of students to the bright future that lies ahead.

From Cypress College Associated Students of 2021, thank you to all our fellow Chargers for taking this journey with us.

In solidarity,

Cypress College Associated Students