

January 31, 2008

An Open Letter to the USC Community and Our Neighbors

In fall 2006 after students had difficulty entering the Nebraska football game I wrote to the USC community apologizing about the way the university handled the matter. We worked with student leaders and the department of athletics to expand the numbers of tickets available to students for games and improve student gate entrance procedures. Our resolution was appreciated by students, parents and alumni who were upset about what happened.

Today I apologize to the USC community and our neighbors in the north university park community about something even more serious; the selfish and dangerous behavior of over 1500 students and others who participated in the Around the World 30th street block party on Friday, January 25, 2008, that resulted in nearly 100 Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers being called to quell the situation. This incident also resulted in the arrest of nine persons, including eight students. The university is disappointed and embarrassed by the behavior of our students and will take immediate action to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future.

Over the past 15 years USC has emerged as one of the top and most sought after universities for students and families seeking a first-rate and unique undergraduate educational experience. We are proud of faculty scholarship and research, the academic and community service activities of our students, and university's contributions, as the largest private employer in the city, to the renaissance of downtown Los Angeles.

But, the behavior that was demonstrated last Friday night says loud and clear that some students think this is "the university of spoiled children" and that they can do what they want without regard or concern for our neighbors, city ordinances, or common sense. Those who planned the parties at the nine houses on 30th street had good intentions. Unfortunately, the execution of their plans was flawed and advertising on Facebook and "word-of-mouth" which encouraged students to drink before arriving and to bring their own booze brought many more guests to the area than could be managed. When the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and LAPD arrived as a result of complaints from residents in the area they found a situation that appeared out of control. The houses were full and the street was full in violation of numerous city ordinances. This created a dangerous situation for party goers and others who live in the area. It had to be ended.

As vice president for student affairs I have always advocated for students to be able to have parties and social activities of their choosing as long as they are fun, safe and managed within university, city, and state policies and laws. We are now in an era in which parties have become opportunities for shows on YouTube and other social networks. The film footage of last Friday's scene clearly showed how ugly things were, the fact that many students were not following instructions of the police, and that had the party not been ended things could have gotten worse. Our neighbors had to deal with public drunkenness, helicopter noise, loud music, and police bullhorns, and sirens.

LAPD officers were called in from around the city from other assignments. Some have complained that police officers handled students too roughly. These complaints will be fully reviewed in the appropriate manner. However, we must not forget what resulted in this mess; poor planning by organizers, an unwillingness to abide by city ordinances, disregard for neighbors, and not following instructions from the police thereby creating serious liability issues for party planners and their parents and landlords.

The university will work with landlords, city officials, and students to try to prevent this from happening again. The university will also take action against those who show blatant disregard for university policy, local laws, and general disrespect for our neighbors and the community within which we live and learn. We will start by reviewing the actions of those involved in last Friday's events.

Michael L. Jackson, Vice President for Student Affairs