

March 14, 2003

Faculty
University of Southern California

Dear Colleagues,

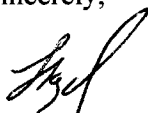
None of us can doubt that the next few weeks and months will be tense and difficult ones for us all, in an increasingly divided political climate that cannot but affect our work lives as well as our personal lives. As teachers and academics, we carry a particular and important responsibility, and the privilege of freedom of expression which we hold so dear brings with it also considerable responsibilities.

We write to ask you to bear this in mind in the next few months, for a war or even the threat of war cannot but affect us and our students in deep ways. We will have differing opinions as individuals on what is happening in our world, but we would ask all of you to remember that in our classrooms most especially, we have a duty to ensure that students can continue to rely on a trusted and comfortable environment. For the greater number of our students, this will be the first time in their lives that the prospect or conduct of war has struck close to home; they may have opinions with which we disagree, but we should always remember that their years at USC are fundamentally those years in which they are learning how to form opinions with substance.

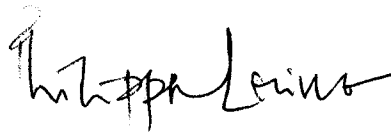
Our job is not to insist that they side with us or with the majority opinion in our classrooms, but to guide them in finding their own world views. We have a special obligation at this time to strive to foster a classroom climate in which students do not feel alienated, isolated, or silenced because of their views on the current political situation. Our students are from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and they will bring with them as diverse a range of beliefs, opinions, and even prejudices with them. While it is certainly our job to reveal the workings and consequences of prejudice, we would urge sensitivity and care at this difficult time.

We hope we have your support in asking all of you to maintain the civil discourse so recently called for in an Academic Senate resolution as you discuss and debate the current political situation in your classrooms and with one another. Universities have a critical role to play in times like these, fostering debate, allowing space for a variety of views, and helping students explore the abundance of issues at stake. We do no good if we encourage divisiveness and anger; we might do some concrete good if we demonstrate tolerance and open-mindedness in our conversation, in our teaching, and in our general conduct.

Sincerely,



Lloyd Armstrong, Jr.
Provost



Philippa Levine
Academic Senate President