



**Division of
Student Affairs**

Michael L. Jackson
Vice President for
Student Affairs

An Open Letter to the University Community

I write to clear up misunderstandings about the University of Southern California's stance on free expression and dissent that have arisen as a result of a student affairs staff member incorrectly stopping the performance of George Weiss Vando's Man Lady show that was part of Gender and Sexuality Week in late January 2006. The show should not have been stopped and I am sorry that it was halted. The speaker had permission to speak at Trojan Square and use amplified sound. And even though the university prefers to schedule those who speak and perform in Trojan Square, Mr. Vando could have spoken in Trojan Square without using amplified sound.

During the intervening weeks there has been lots of healthy discussion about this incident and the other national and international controversies about freedom of expression in the residences, classes, and special programs sponsored by the Annenberg school of communication and the academic senate.

Folks have expressed outrage at what happened during this incident at USC and rightly so. Others have written thoughtful stories, letters and opinion pieces in the Daily Trojan. I have talked about what happened with leaders of the undergraduate student senate, the faculty senate, and other student and academic leaders on campus. I assured them that USC's policy on free speech and dissent has not changed. A very unfortunate mistake in judgment was made that called into question one of the most fundamental tenets of a university community; freedom of speech and its special place in promoting discussion, inquiry, and the exchange of ideas.

The incident is a reminder to me that we must make sure that all student affairs staff and members of the department of public safety (DPS) have read and understand the policies and practices that guide how free speech and dissent may occur on our campus. DPS Chief Cary Drayton has agreed to work with us on this effort. It is also important that members of the university community be knowledgeable about the USC policies on freedom of speech and dissent. To this end, the policy which is published in Scampus every year is provided below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael L. Jackson", is written over a white background. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael L. Jackson
Vice President for Student Affairs

University Policy on Free Expression and Dissent

The University of Southern California is committed to fostering a learning environment where free inquiry and expression are encouraged and celebrated and for which all its members share responsibility. Dissent (defined as disagreement, a difference of opinion, or thinking differently from others) is an integral aspect of expression in higher education, whether it manifests itself in a new and differing theory in quantum mechanics, a personal disagreement with a current foreign policy, opposition to a position taken by the university itself, or by some other means.

The university is a diverse community based on free exchange of ideas and devoted to the use of reason and thought in the resolution of differences. Whether in free debate or in the exchange of information, this community must rely on self-restraint and self-discipline if it is to retain its freedom to search and question. However, when self-restraint and self-discipline fail, the univer-