



December 20, 2023

Professor Karma Chávez  
College of Liberal Arts  
Gordon White Building  
210 W 24<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78712

*Delivered via email to karma.chavez@utexas.edu*

Dear Professor Chávez et al.,

Thank you for sharing your concerns about freedom of speech and the impact events in the Middle East continue to have on our campus. I share your desire for all community members to be able to express themselves and to feel safe and supported, especially during this time of conflict. Contrary to your assertions, our University has gone to great lengths to protect free speech, offer support and resources, and ensure the safety of every member of our campus community.

First and foremost, we have and will always protect free speech. Since the events of Oct. 7, both our Dean of Students Office and UT Police have staffed and patrolled numerous demonstrations and informational events, including many that are pro-Palestinian, to make sure that all members of our community who participate are safe and supported in exercising their rights. This includes sponsored and registered student organizations, such as Student Government.

However, as a university, we cannot allow disruptions to the teaching and research activities of our students, faculty and staff; the operations of our campus; or our events. We will investigate such events and will punish those found to have violated our rules, policies, or the law. While I appreciate that it is difficult for faculty members or others outside of any particular situation to know all the facts, it is important to not allow the propagation of false narratives — organically or through more coordinated disinformation campaigns — to tarnish our collegial relationships, to influence our decisions, or to cause us to waiver.

Central to the integrity of our teaching mission is our ability to ensure that classroom communications meet our standards of professionalism, including relating to the associated academic course. Classroom communications cannot be used to deliver personal political messages, no matter what side of an issue those communications represent. It is easy to see why personal political messages delivered via classroom communications channels would impede learning for some students and not set the right environment to enable all our students to thrive. Such messages would tend to alienate some portion of the students in almost any given class, which would be inconsistent with both our policies and our mission.

At this time, while the University process is in progress, it is not appropriate for me to address the individual circumstances of the two teaching assistants reassigned in the Steve Hicks School of Social Work. It is worth noting that social media and various groups' demand letters to our administration adopt false facts as the basis for demands around those circumstances. Please rest assured that we will remain principled and assess the actual facts, apply the policy, provide any required due process, and resolve the matter in compliance with our policies, independent of any external pressures we may face.

**JAY HARTZELL, President**



The safety and well-being of our community will always be our highest priority. We continue to urge anyone who feels threatened or unsafe to contact UT Police and for those struggling emotionally to engage our mental health and student emergency resources. If you are aware of anyone who has not been allowed to engage in protected speech in our common outdoor areas, if you believe individuals are violating our speech rules, or that the rules have not been applied evenhandedly, please provide those details to our [Compliance hotline](#) so that your concerns can be examined and addressed, where appropriate.

As stated in the October communication you reference, the University remains committed to doing all we can to protect and support all our faculty, staff and students, and especially those most vulnerable, including our Jewish, Palestinian and Muslim community members. The confrontation at Welch Hall was shocking and disappointing. The University immediately reached out to the Palestine Solidarity Committee to provide support, and UT Police have now completed their investigation, with no finding of criminal conduct. We continue to actively enforce our rules for safe behavior toward others and identify any perpetrators who violate them.

I sincerely appreciate your concerns for the rights and well-being of our entire University community, concerns that we share. I trust that this response has clarified the University's actions and demonstrated how we have taken seriously the impact these events have had on our community.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Hartzell".

Jay Hartzell

cc: Sharon Wood, Executive Vice President and Provost

**JAY HARTZELL, President**