

January 2012

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE ADMINISTRATIONS OF UC BERKLEY, UC DAVIS,
AND ALL AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

On November 9th, 2011, students and faculty members peacefully protesting in University of California, Berkeley's Sproul Plaza were brutally repressed by campus police in full riot gear equipped with batons and bean-bag guns used to violently disperse the protest. In response to the events at UC Berkeley, students at UC Davis participated in a non-violent protest; while sitting in an expression of non-violent resistance, over a dozen students were assaulted with pepper spray at close range and subsequently sustained injuries.

As representatives of our respective student bodies, we are appalled by the unnecessary use of force sanctioned by university administrations and carried out by campus police against non-violent protesters at UC Berkeley and UC Davis. We believe that the use of violence to quell peaceful civil disobedience and protest violates the rights of university students and faculty as guaranteed under the United States Constitution and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and as reinforced by numerous freedom of speech and excessive force court cases (e.g., [*Headwaters Forest Defense v. County of Humboldt*](#)).

In a recent open letter to the UC Davis chancellor, one of the university's associate professors, Nathan Brown, said: "I am writing to tell you in no uncertain terms that there must be space for protest on our campus. There must be space for political dissent on our campus. There must be space for civil disobedience on our campus. There must be space for students to assert their right to decide on the form of their protest, their dissent, and their civil disobedience—including the simple act of setting up tents in solidarity with other students who have done so. There must be space for protest and dissent, especially, when the object of protest and dissent is police brutality itself."

University administrations are responsible for promoting and maintaining a tolerant and safe environment that permits and encourages political discourse and dissent. While safety and security needs--used as justification for dispersing peaceful protest--are legitimate concerns, police violence is dangerous, counter-productive, and unconstitutional. University administrations must pursue alternative methods to maintain safety and security while upholding the rights of students and faculty to protest freely without fear of violent repression.

We exhort the administrations of UC Berkeley, UC Davis, and universities across the United States to avoid the use of force in dealing with peaceful student protests. We call upon our respective administrations to engage in open and honest dialogue with community members. We encourage them to review and craft transparent, fair, and non-violent policy to protect students and faculty exercising their right to peaceful civil disobedience. Most importantly, we insist that our universities work to uphold the freedoms of free speech and peaceful assembly guaranteed to us by our collective conscience and the law of our land.

Signed:

Northwestern University Associated Student Government
Associated Students of the University of Oregon
Williams College Council
Harvard Undergraduate Council
Georgetown University Student Association
Wellesley College Government