

Public Comment of Matthew Garrett to Bakersfield College Academic Senate

October 19, 2022

Colleagues,

I support open free speech and at times that leads to contested debate. I think we need contested debate to find the best path forward, but that debate should center on ideas, policies, and programs, not on individuals. Sadly, our campus has descended into a repeat strategy of repackaging opposition to an idea as some sort of personal attack necessitating an outrage mob to silence the opposition.

Over the past week we have seen two cancellation campaigns. I see in the submitted public comments today that we have two more targets.

In EODAC, we had another undeniably contentious meeting, and we are now seeing foul misrepresentation to attack individuals who dare dissent, packaged with a whole lot of “I feel” claims that cannot be refuted. But this “he said, she said” nonsense gets us nowhere, so I have a simple solution for any who really want to know what really happened: check the recording. There are swirling rumors that the faculty chair recorded the meeting which is perfectly legal because it was a public meeting: the agenda was posted publicly, the doors propped open, and community members attended. If the recording exists, let’s make it available an anybody who wants to know what really happened, but really, we should probably move on to discussing ideas, policies and programs – perhaps the very issue that I believe really caused the committee outrage: Is the proposed racial climate task force justified? The survey used to justify it was conducted in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd and filled with loaded questions but still it found that only a small fraction of students of color had concerns. How does that compare to other schools who took this survey? What would we find if we repeated the survey now? And is there any doubt that a task force lacking diverse membership has already drawn its conclusions? What then is the point of the taskforce? Why not just skip directly to their demands?

And then we have Curriculum Committee where several individuals have worked to intimidate others to ensure they get the right votes. We also saw the administration secretly withholding public comments from the committee members until community members demanded the Trustees intervene; the administration is preparing to violate Brown Act on three different accounts when they meet tomorrow to force through contested curriculum that in all truth deserves a much more robust conversation **but**, according to the COR, the chancellor wants it STAT, and anyone who questions may also find their name smeared in the newspaper.

I ask that we allow thoughtful debate of ideas, policies and programs without resorting to ad hominem attacks, cancel culture leverage, or the tired old “if you don’t support my idea, you don’t support students” argument. Can we please have thoughtful discussion of proposals without mischaracterizing dissenters as racist, sexist, or class-ist?