Vincent Munoz:

I think what we need to do is explain how our principles of free speech, free inquiry will help serve the cause of justice.

Betty Friendan:

The First Amendment, the constitutional freedom of speech and freedom of conscience that is the bulwark of our democracy.

Bettina Apthekar:

There was a passion in what was being said, affirming this... what people considered a sacred constitutional right, freedom of speech and freedom of association.

Michelle Deutchman:

From the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, this is SpeechMatters, a podcast about expression engagement in democratic learning in higher education. I'm Michelle Deutchman, the center's executive director and your host. Since October 7th, campus free expression issues have been splashed across the front pages of national newspapers and have been the subject of not one but two congressional hearings. The last two months have seen an explosion of campus protests, statements from college and university presidents, open letters to campus communities, responses to those letters, student government and congressional resolutions, posters, and other forms of expression about the Israel-Hamas War.

Questions abound about the limits of First Amendment protections, including what constitutes a disruption or a legal threat about the responsibilities of colleges and universities when students assert they feel unsafe, about what happens when the faculty member posts something on their personal social media account that students find deeply offensive and no longer want to be in that professor's class. Each of these questions warrants its own episode, and in the coming year, we will dedicate time to discussing them. But today, we're going to take a different approach. Rather than look through legal lens, we're going to shift our focus to campus climate and to what steps administrators are taking to offer support to students and the campus community who've been profoundly impacted by the ongoing war and by the pain that results from speech that, albeit protected, causes many to feel excluded, unsafe, and isolated.

Today's guests, Dr. Katya Armistead, assistant vice chancellor and dean of student life at UC Santa Barbara, and Dr. Genie Kim, director of student mental health and well-being at the UC Office of the President, have tremendous experience with responding when there are crises on campus. But before we dive into our conversation with them, let's turn to class notes a look at what's making headlines. The higher education and political worlds are still reeling from the testimony of Harvard, Penn, and MIT's college presidents last week in front of the House Education Committee. Despite four hours of testimony, one soundbite went viral. Representative Elise Stefanik, a Republican from New York, grilling presidents about whether calling for genocide of Jews violated the code of conduct at their respective schools. The presidents gave legally accurate answers but were seen as cold and out of touch. Following the hearing, outraged donors, politicians, parents, alumni, and campus stakeholders called for their resignations.

As of this recording, Penn President Liz Magill has stepped down, as has the university's board chair, while Harvard just announced that Harvard President Claudine Gay will stay at the helm. In response to skyrocketing reports of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia on college and university campuses, the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights has opened over 10 Title VI investigations concerning discrimination based on shared ancestry at colleges and universities. Institutions under investigation include Columbia Harvard, Penn, Tulane, University of Cincinnati, and University of Tampa. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act requires federally funded institutions to protect students from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. The education department has said this includes Jews, Muslims, and other ethnic or religious groups with, quote, "Shared ancestry," unquote.

In late November, the Brandeis Center and Jewish Americans for Fairness in Education sued the UC system, Berkeley Law School, and its leaders, alleging the quote, "Longstanding unchecked spread of anti-Semitism," unquote. In response, Berkeley issued a statement which said in part, "While we appreciate the concerns expressed by the Brandeis Center, UC Berkeley believes the claims made in the lawsuit are not consistent with the First Amendment of the Constitution, or with the facts of what is actually happening on our campus," close quote. Although attention has been focused on issues related to the Israel-Hamas War threats to the academy continue to mount in the form of state legislation aimed at restricting the teaching of certain subjects. PEN America's most recent publication on these education gag orders report that legislators are shifting tactics.

Rather than focusing efforts on directly censoring professors, legislators are instead targeting the academic support system, including faculty unions, accreditors, and governing boards. Penn divided the proposed legislation into four categories, curricular control bills, tenure restrictions, DEI bans, and accreditation restrictions. While Penn notes that resistance to education restrictions is growing the good news, so will the ongoing escalation of attacks on the academy, especially in light of next year's general election. The bad news. We need to make sure we stay vigilant lest we lose focus on these types of challenges while we face others. Now, back to today's guests. Genie Kim is the system-wide director for student mental health and well-being at the UC Office of the President.

She started her career as a student intern for the Women's Leadership Initiative at Penn State, which sparked her passion for student programs, services, and supports. In 2010, she wrapped up her masters in Public Policy program and started her professional career at UC Santa Barbara, working alongside students to develop and implement harm reduction approaches to substance use and misuse. Her most memorable moment was working on a new initiative called Gaucho FYI to help orient students to the unique campus culture of UCSB, where she received the Citation of Excellence Award for her work on this initiative. In 2015, Genie took on the role of director of well-being at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. In this role, she worked alongside students, staff, and faculty to infuse the campus with a culture of well-being and belonging.

In 2020, Genie joined the UC Office of the President and has helped steward the system-wide equity and mental health framework, which ensures a wide range of services and supports are provided to students across the behavioral health continuum of care. Katya Armistead, a UCSB graduate. Wow. Gaucho's so well represented, is the assistant vice chancellor and dean of student life at UC Santa Barbara. She's been working in student life at UCSB since 2007. In 2015, Katya was appointed as dean of student life. Her most memorable contributions to student life include working with groups of students to bring their ideas for events and initiatives to fruition, especially in the wake of adversity, crisis, and even tragedy. Her aspirations for the near future in her role are to foster increased collaboration among student life units and to foster a sense of campus community such that all students feel they truly belong.

Katya received her Doctorate in Educational Leadership from a joint program between UCSB and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Katya has been part of the center community as an indispensable partner and as a voice grantee since 2021, using voice funds to start the Civic Engagement Scholars program alongside colleague Viviana Marsano. I want to start by extending a special thank you to both of you. I know what a challenging, fraught, and overwhelming time it is on campuses and how busy both of you are working to support students and the community, and I'm grateful that you're willing to take the time to talk with me today.

Dr. Katya Armistead:

Thank you, Michelle. It's great to be here, and it's great because I know Genie from when she worked at UCSB, so.

Michelle Deutchman:

Well, I was going to say you both kind of had this UCSB Cal Poly trajectory, so it is a coincidence that the two of you are now coming together now, but a very fortuitous coincidence. So, usually, I like to start a conversation with guests by hearing a little bit about their origin stories, right, their journeys. What past took you to where you are now? And so, I'd love to start by asking each of you what made you want to focus your professional lives on working with and supporting college students. And Katya, why don't you kick it off?

Dr. Katya Armistead:

Sure, thanks. I knew early on, as a younger professional or just getting my profession started, that I wanted to work with young people, and college-aged students seemed like a really good place to land. I think as a Black woman, mixed-race woman attending college in the 80s, it was tough. I really struggled as a student of color.

And so, one of my very clear goals when I got my first job here at UC Santa Barbara is I wanted to make a difference and create a campus culture that was really welcoming to students of color. And so I was really inspired by that desire to do so. And so it makes sense that I'm where I am now, and how I got here was really focusing on students.

Michelle Deutchman:

Thank you so much. How about you Genie?

Dr. Genie Kim:

Yeah, thank you so much. I am a first generation student, Asian American woman, and also a former student-athlete. And so when I went to undergrad... And I was born and raised in California. When I went to undergrad at Penn State all the way across the country to experience something completely brand new, it was really my opportunity to kind of learn and grow and I had always wanted to be in a helping profession. So whether it was helping children at risk or whether it was helping young adults or transitional-aged youth, I knew that being with people was something that was really close, and near and dear to my heart.

And so when I had the opportunity to intern as... within the Women's Leadership Initiative, that was my first step into seeing what goes on behind the scenes in higher ed and how different programs and initiatives can really help individuals launch into their professional careers and help shape where they go and support them as human beings, right. And so when I got my first professional job at UC Santa Barbara, I got to work alongside peer educators and students and they just filled me with so much love, and excitement, and energy, and I loved that piece of the job.

Seeing the growth of an individual, right, who's learning about a different subject matter area, growing into their leadership and their power, and advocating for resources and services and supports for the things that they cared about the most, and doing so in a compassionate and understanding way, I was hooked. I really loved that environment of working alongside our student leaders and pairing that with being able to provide services and supports on a college campus. And I haven't looked back since.

Michelle Deutchman:

Thank you both for sharing. I can still feel the excitement that you both feel when you talk about your work, which I think especially at this moment when a lot of folks in administration and higher education are feeling burnt out and are moving on, it's really nice to hear. I will digress for one second, Genie because I feel like I need to ask you what your sport was.

Dr. Genie Kim:

I was a collegiate swimmer, so as you can imagine, going to Penn State, the most exciting thing was coming back to my dorm room after an early morning practice and my hair being frozen and being like, "Oh my gosh, my hair's frozen." But yeah, I was a collegiate swimmer.

Michelle Deutchman:

That's awesome. A topic for another time, and yes, the first time I moved to the East Coast, I did the same thing. I went out with wet hair, and then it froze. So all of us Californians. So as I set out at the top of the episode, this is a moment where a lot of people on campus and in the world need support.

And I know that supporting students can be very individual and can take a lot of different forms, whether that's through counseling, by showing up at events, just even being there in a listening capacity. And I'm wondering if each of you can talk a little bit about what support looks like right now, given the current moment, and Genie, why don't you start?

Dr. Genie Kim:

Yeah. I think this is a really critical moment in time where folks are looking for different types of support. I think, oftentimes, when we think individuals are experiencing a crisis or a challenging traumatic event that's happening around us where we don't necessarily have control of the situation, it can be really tricky and challenging to navigate that when you're alone, right. And I think what support looks like right now is finding community. So finding or seeking out whatever community feels most comfortable for you as an individual human being, right, where you feel a sense of safety, trust, support, compassion, where you can be yourself and express what those feelings are and be able to have dialogue with folks that you feel safe having that conversation with.

So I would say, first and foremost, what types of communities are available for individuals. And then if it becomes a point in time where it really is impacting your everyday life where it's challenging for you to get up in the morning or you're experiencing trauma and triggers and different things where it's impacting maybe your academics or work, right. Then there's more additional services and supports in the more clinical counseling realm that could help support an individual who may be experiencing more severe mental health challenges, right. But it's on a spectrum. We know that there's harm. We know that folks are hurting. It looks differently for each individual. And so, being able to find that sense of community and then seek out additional resources and supports if necessary are really great options.

Michelle Deutchman:

And it's almost like you planned my lead-in to Katya because when you talk about community, I know that so much of what Katya, as dean of students, does, which is helping to build that community. And I imagine that, in this exact moment, it is likely very challenging. And so, Katya I'd love to hear from you about what support looks like from your student affair seat.

Dr. Katya Armistead:

Supporting student looks like having meetings with them, showing up to their events. I'm responsible for a Demonstration Response Team, which is student affairs professional that are around and visible and bear witness to protest, to support students through that to advocate for their free speech. I think, for me, it's all about listening and being present, showing up, letting them know that I'm here. Even if they're angry at me, I still just show up. Students who feel a particular way about something will ask for a meeting with me and maybe the vice chancellor. We are always ready and willing to do that, even when it's really hard.

I've been yelled at quite a bit, and I take a deep breath and know that they're letting off steam and sometimes, especially at this time, they don't have another place to blow off that steam, and they expect something of us in terms of making them feel better on our campus. And so if I can just at least sit there and listen to them and then get them to a place where then we can start talking about resources, next steps, what actions can they do? I would say what's important for me to be... to show up for them is to pay attention to what is going on, what is happening on the campus climate, what's happening in the world that is triggering them.

And I do that through staying on top of things [inaudible 00:17:10] listening to podcasts, reading, hearing students' stories. And showing up in those ways, I think, is helpful and supportive for students. It's time. It's spending time with them. Even when I am following a protest by a particular group of folks who want to express themselves, it's me seeing the other students watching this, seeing the hurt on their face or the confusion, and stopping and checking in with them. "How are you doing? This could be really hard for you. Do you have to be here? Do you need to be here? How can I support you as this protest is going on?" So it's so about being present and listening.

Michelle Deutchman:

Two things that I know a lot of us endeavor to do just in our day-to-day life. And it's hard enough when there isn't an ongoing geopolitical crisis and kind of crisis on campus. I was thinking about the last bunch of years on campuses, right, whether it was sort of following the 2016 election, following the murder of George Floyd, the pandemic, and there has been a lot of challenge. And I'm wondering if you're finding that what students need now and this moment of the Israel-Hamas War is different or similar to what students have needed in other crisis moments?

Dr. Katya Armistead:

I would say that it is very similar in some ways and very different in other ways. It's similar that, number one, listening, communicating, looking for ways to provide support, continuing to educate yourself in what is going on. For me, I am dean of all students, so it's never about taking sides. It's being neutral, which can be problematic and really difficult, especially that's something that's different right now. Using the George Floyd murder as an example, as a Black woman, very comfortable with the statement and the passion around Black Lives Matter. That's part of my identity.

Feeling very good about that is the right side to be on. Not really having to talk a lot about how I was feeling or whatever, but being able to show up and support students as they protested, as they expressed themselves, and navigating any kind of conflict or being able to say white supremacy is an issue, is a problem. So the comfortability of relating to that, talking about it, supporting students during that time, this is where the difference is of this time. This is so much more nuanced, so much more complicated. And so supporting students through this feels really, really different in that respect.

This is where I definitely act on my mantra and live the mantra, which I always try to do. But I'm real clear about that and very transparent that it's not about me taking sides. It's where can I support a student or a group of students as they are grappling through what is going on and how they are feeling. And that can be complicated too because we'll probably talk about social media, and there is a cry for, "Pick a side. You have to pick a side." And that's not what I'm about. I'm going to stay educated. I'm going to be reading. I'm going to be listening. I'm going to have conversations.

But what now... what my call is now is to make sure a student's event happens that they're supported, that it's not interfered with that a protest can happen. So I'd say the biggest difference in terms of what I am seeing and the role that I'm playing is being there for all students, even when I see how triggered and frustrated they are, and maybe they do some things that they shouldn't be, and then having those conversations. "Do you really need to do that? Do you need to say that? Is that helping? What do you need? How can you express yourself in a more productive way?"

Having a lot of conversations about civil discourse, taking a break. "Do you really need to be here? This is really triggering. A lot's going on right now." So it's asking questions, it's supporting, and it is harder to do right now. It is really much more complicated and way more nuanced than in other issues that I've helped with. Even with the election with Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, that was a really challenging time on campus as well and more divided, more like now compared to the George Floyd situation. However, it was a little bit more simple.

Michelle Deutchman:

I can only imagine how difficult it is because we're in a moment in our country, but also in this particular situation where it's very binary. You're either with us or against us. And I can also imagine, and you can think about this while I let Genie kind of respond to that question before, was just, it's also a challenge because I know some students feel like the university by speaking out and using their institutional voices that the university has taken aside. Whether that is accurate or not, that's their perception. And so I can imagine that also makes it difficult because you are a representative of the university, right, whether it's UCSB or UCOP. Genie, what are your thoughts?

Dr. Genie Kim:

Yeah, I'll just add, I think speaking to this moment in time and thinking about the cohort of students who've experienced multiple traumatic events kind of succinctly one after the other, I think this moment in time is unique in that they've experienced the murder of George Floyd, the pandemic, and needing to navigate a national public health crisis on top of the various traumatic events that are happening currently, right. And I think about it in terms of if I'm a student who may hold one of those identities, experiencing the campus for what it is and trying to find the folks or the helpers or the staff or the faculty that I can have conversations about this with, right.

Or maybe it's I feel more comfortable talking to my family at home about these political issues or the challenges that are happening. And I just imagine that if I hold multiple identities that span all of these areas, it can be even more challenging, right. And so I just feel that there's quite a bit of trauma that's happening just in general with all of these different things that are occurring on our campuses. And it's different because it's not just a mental health challenge. And so when we talk with our counseling directors, and we talk about what do students need right now in this moment? And it's students are struggling right now, and they could be in a state of, "I'm just angry, right."

And it's okay to have feelings of anger in this moment. That doesn't mean that it's a bad thing, but you have to kind of go through the process of grief or the challenges that you move through or the different stages that you move through when there's a challenging or upsetting situation, right. And so folks aren't in that readiness of change perspective. We hear folks say, "Well, we need to have... we need to bring two sides together, and we need to have discussion and dialogue about that." And they're not quite ready for that to happen, right. There's harm that's been done, whether it's mistrust with leadership... between leadership and students.

It's just a lot's going on at the same time, right. And I think it's a reminder for us to kind of pause in these moments of crises, right. When things get kind of... When things bubble up to the surface, and there's just so much tension that's there, and folks make various decisions, right, as Katya was mentioning before, and it becomes so heated that folks may make poor choices in that moment. And then, all of a sudden, that poor choice turns into another unintended consequence that kind of snowballs into this cause-and-effect relationship. And I think if I would make any recommendations about this moment in time because of that, it's how do we give ourselves grace?

How do we slow down and pause? How do we think about how we're showing up to these different spaces, as Katya had mentioned previously, with intentionality, with checking ourselves and our emotions and taking care of ourselves first and foremost, right? And I think that's part of the piece or that tension that ends up happening when there have been multiple situations that have occurred over a short period of time. And I mean, I would say, what? It's only been about five years during this time span, and so many crisis incidents have happened in that time span. So how do we kind of pause and just take care of ourselves with kindness and compassion in these moments of crises?

Dr. Katya Armistead:

I just want to uplift that, Genie, in naming that we all have, but the focus, at least for us in our jobs, is students, that they have gone through so much over the last five years. And so this time is just fraught with also pent-up frustration and anger and just a little bit of despair. So I thought that was really good that you uplifted that.

Michelle Deutchman:

I think pausing in a world where the expectation is immediacy and instant ratification is very challenging. So you both have touched on so many of the things that I want to get to, right, social media, self-care. But before that, I want to ask. I don't know if this is going to sound weird, but I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about what are things that... Obviously, you're so focused on helping students.

What are things students can do to help you help them, right? So I've heard a lot of students talk about how they don't feel seen, they don't feel heard, and that's a very despairing emotion, but it isn't very specific. And so I wonder what kinds of questions might you be asking them or how can you speak to them and say, "What would help us be able to really direct our focus so that we can really be honing in on what it is that you need?"

Dr. Genie Kim:

I think it's hard because when we're put in that place, I never want to put more burden on our students to tell us what they need. So I'm just going to name that. But at the same time, I think if anything, so if I'm an individual student and there's a particular ask. Or I'm working with a faculty member or a staff member, and I'm struggling that day, is there a way to open up dialogue and conversation to be a little bit vulnerable and say, "I'm having a tough day today, right." And you don't have to go into detail, right. I think disclosing information is very personal, and some folks have a higher tolerance or very open books and very open-minded about being able to share what's happening. But I think as human beings, oftentimes we're too scared to be a little bit vulnerable to share what's happening in our own personal lives.

I think, as a society, we've kind of set us up for failure where we have to put on these masks and show up and be brave and kind of perpetuated these assumptions or these social norms that it's not okay to be... not okay or it's okay... I'm getting that terminology mixed up. But so if there's a way to be a little bit more vulnerable and share what you're feeling, sharing how if somebody said something that harmed you or hurt your feelings, say, "Hey, that hurt my feelings." Right. So being able to communicate or articulate some of the conflict that's happening and being a little bit vulnerable. And I would say, similarly, on the other side of the coin, us as leaders also need to be a little bit vulnerable and share with others when we feel uncomfortable or reconcile. I'm thinking about reconciliation and how we have those conversations and say, "I'm so sorry. I said the wrong term, right."

So, oftentimes, there's so much that's happening. We may say something quickly because we're responding, and it might not be the appropriate response, or somebody's stressed, and you may say something, and maybe later on you're reflecting on that, and you're like, "Oh, I shouldn't have said it that way, or shouldn't have responded that way." Right. So being able to pause and come back and reconcile that with somebody that you've had a conversation with, I think, can be so helpful when there's misunderstandings, when there's conflict, and when there's challenges. So just being a little bit more vulnerable and checking in with ourselves and checking in with others about different scenarios or situations that we're placed in.

Michelle Deutchman:

Thank you, Katya.

Dr. Katya Armistead:

Yeah. Well, I'm going to focus on student activists and student leaders because they're the ones that I interact with the most. And I think that they have a lot of influence on other students. And so you really have to talk to them about self-care. It's so critical because they have this huge sense of responsibility that they are leading. They are stepping up. They're modeling what needs to be done. They're helping put out there the injustices, how students are feeling. And so they're creating a lot of space for students, which can be wonderful. I think they grow a lot. I just only imagine what they're going to do next after they graduate from college.

But then the other side of that is they're worn out, they're exhausted. My role, I feel, is that I really need to get to them and say, "Okay, have you taken a break? You don't have to carry the load." Just to remind them that, "What you're doing is important. It's amazing. You are an amazing leader." So let them know that they're doing good work. And then, "What are you doing to take care of yourself? How are you feeling? What do you need?" Get them to take that break to relax for a moment. "Do you really need to be here? Can someone else step up? Have you gone to class? Did you get your homework and you're reading done?" Even more importantly, "Are you sleeping? Are you eating?"

And so trying to get to those leaders, those activists, those people who are working really hard on behalf of their community, those are the ones that I'll hone in on. The last piece that I'll say when I'm connecting with them, getting them to think about where they can slow down or take a break, take a breath, is we hear a lot like, "I don't feel safe." And so, "Okay, what does safety look like that... look like to you?" Get them to define the words that they're using as well. And that's where you can get more in claims, or they hear themselves define it and ask the questions to figure out how they can take a role and responsibility for self-care because there's a lot of verbiage out there.

Language is an interesting thing, and we all have different definitions of what a word means. So get them to articulate that so that then you can have a real conversation about how to support them and how they can support themselves. But they have to name it. And so, "What does safety look like? Let's think about the words that you're using." And that will also influence the folks that are following you so you can make sure that they're taking a break. "Do you really want all of these students here in this space that can be really triggering? Let's think about that too, and use that time wisely so that you are taking care of the students that are following you." So those are the things that come to mind for me.

Michelle Deutchman:

And those are all very helpful. And you use the word verbiage and definitions, and I think that's a great segue to come back to speech and sort of expression and discourse, which, of course, is at the heart of what the center does. And Katya anticipated this earlier about social media, and I'm going to preface this by telling you that I am... have a bias against social media.

I'm just not sure that the benefits outweigh the downsides, especially as it pertains to discourse and especially as it pertains to a particular crisis moment like this. And I'm wondering if either of you have seen an impact on student wellness and well-being because of the increased reliance and use of social media, how that dynamic has changed things.

Dr. Genie Kim:

I think social media has had its benefits in providing connection and the networks, and as you're using it as an opportunity to stay connected with people and in touch with people. But what I have seen is the unhealthy impacts of social media on students' lives, whether it's, "I'm staying up until 1, 2, 3 a.m. in the morning and I'm a consumer now of the media that's being presented to me, right." Or that there aren't filters, or now I have access to 24/7 information and timely information, which can be helpful, but it can also be harmful, right.

And so for me, in thinking about providing any advice related to social media, sometimes I tell colleagues and students themselves, "Taking a social media break can be really helpful for your mental well-being, especially when we're consuming so much information. And it can be misinformation or include misinformation in there, but it can heighten feelings of anxiety. It can heighten depression. It can heighten... It can even produce social isolation also because you're relying on social media to be connected and may not actually physically connect with other people."

The one thing, though, that I've definitely heard from our students is I've seen a big shift in a lot of our students taking a break from social media as well, where they recognize that it can be harmful for them and their well-being. So I think it's definitely another one of those things where you have to have a balanced approach to your exposure to it. And you also have to be informed about how it can be helpful but how it can be harmful to one's well-being. And I'll stop there and I'll ask Katya to also add her thoughts.

Dr. Katya Armistead:

Oh, social media. Lots of reports of feeling hurt triggered, all the isms, anti-Semitism, racism, Islamophobia, all the things. And so, from my lens as dean of student life, I get reports all the time. "This was on social media. This group is being anti-Semitic. This group is being racist." And so it's fraught. It's really hard. I have social media. I'm old, though. Most of my social media is my students who've gotten married or have babies or new careers, and I love social media for that. Friends from a long time ago, following them. Wonderful stuff. I also learn a lot about what students are thinking on social media. I learn about events. I learn a lot about protests and demonstrations so that we can be prepared.

So it can be really helpful for me, but it can be really triggering and fraught with anger and thoughts about harm someone else is inflicting. Social media is it's how many characters depending on what platform you're on. And so it could also be misread. It doesn't give someone the opportunity to really explain themselves. It's not about asking questions. It's about making statements. A lot of statements on social media. "This group is supporting this group, and this is why." And that, again, is triggering. So I love it, and I hate it, and it's hard. But just like Genie said, it's encouraging students to take breaks. "Do you have to read everything?"

Remind them that it takes a lot of time to stay up on everything, and they got a lot of work to do. So maybe take a break so that you can get your work done and be a successful student. Oh, cancel culture. You say one wrong thing, or it's read incorrectly on social media, and that severs relationships, and that could be... and it's really harmful to community building. So those are the things that I will talk to students about. I ask them to think before they post. "Is it saying what you think it says? Maybe get feedback from someone else before you do that."

I had to have that kind of advice a long time ago, not realizing the consequences of something that I had written on social media. So I hope that we can be honest with our students and share our thoughts in terms of how it comes off. And when I read that, "This is what I'm seeing, is that what you meant?" So thinking about the consequences, why they're posting, what they need, taking breaks, everything you said, Genie, I think, is important, but I see it alive and well-used in activism, and that's good and bad, and it's triggering.

Michelle Deutchman:

And I appreciate that very balanced answer after my not balanced introduction. There's so much about authenticity and vulnerability and the importance of those things. And yet it seems especially difficult in a moment when if something is misread or goes viral or is forwarded that there isn't really space for that sort of learning laboratory that ideally we would like that to be in an educational environment. We've talked a lot about what's happening now while we're sort of in the thick of this, but I do want to spend a couple of moments thinking about the future.

And I know Genie already alluded to this, which is that when emotions are raw and tensions are running high, it's really can be challenging to think about bringing people together and rebuilding trust, both between groups and between students and the institution. But I'd like to believe that at some point, and I'm hoping that sooner rather than later, we're going to have to pick up the pieces from this particular crisis and begin to work to repair and heal at all different levels of relationships. And I'm wondering what role you see yourselves and your teams playing in this.

Dr. Katya Armistead:

Yeah, that modeling, self-care, I need to work on that. That is hard. It is hard being one of the first responders to things, but I do talk a lot about what's important to me and what helps me. I try to model that as much as possible. I'm a big morning walker. I exercise. Talking about those types of habits and really supporting staff and figuring out what works for them is helpful. But I also talk to my students. I teach two classes. So I get in there with students and I ask them what their self-care is. Before my leadership class, we always practice two-minute morning, which really is two-minute week.

And it asks three questions. "What are you going to let go of this week? What are you grateful for? And what are you going to focus on?" And I have them take a few minutes just to journal that and then talk at their tables and share what those are and then do a little share-out. And just trying to help them create that habit has been really wonderful. And getting them to kind of settle in and think about. And hearing that when they share out what they're letting go of. "The stress of this. Can't stop thinking about this mistake I made. I need to let that go" kind of thing to being productive. "I need to stop procrastinating." That kind of stuff.

I think the other piece is you don't have to do it all. Who else can you enlist to help? Maybe you don't show up to that particular protest, or maybe you empower someone else to step up, have them get the experience. Same thing for staff. And that's what I have gotten so much better at over the years. Demonstration Response Team. It used to just be me that went to every single protest. I was like, "Oh, I can't do this anymore. This is really hard. Other staff might want to have the opportunity to learn how to do this and be part of this team." And so I've created teams, and that has been wonderful and empower others to step up.

Michelle Deutchman:

Thanks, Katya. Genie.

Dr. Genie Kim:

I think when I think about recovery, right, so a crisis incident happens, and communities need to recover from that crisis incident that's happened, that's harmed the community, I think it takes time. Time to repair, time to reconnect, time to reset where we are, right. And oftentimes, we don't allow that time for recovery, or maybe we don't even have the opportunity to do it because another crisis has happened, right. So when I think about the scenario of our staff being in that, in the thick of it and it's constant, right.

And earlier, we talked a little bit about burnout and we talked about how some of our staff are leaving the profession because they just... it's just too much. There isn't enough infrastructure built in there to support them. It feels tenuous like the expectation is that our professional staff need to be available 24/7 to respond to crises that happen on our campuses. And so I just want to make sure that we pause and think about our students themselves are bringing up concerns, challenges, telling university leaders what's happening for them. And then university leaders themselves are also responding, but also experiencing harm and trauma themselves too.

So how do you hold those two identities? I'm a responder, but I may also be experiencing the trauma myself, and how do I care for myself, and how do I recover in these moments so that I can show up and be available to support my role, the students that I care so deeply about because that's why we're here and we show up every day. And then fulfill the mission of the University of California in the different campuses or whatever higher ed setting it might be because there's still classes that need to be taught and there's still work that needs to be done, and thinking about all of those things, right.

And so when I think about recovery time and what that looks like, it's different for everyone. And as Katya was saying, putting that oxygen mask on yourself, having really good boundaries is one of the things that I think is so important and figuring what those boundaries are. They may look differently for different people, and people recover differently. It's kind of like that whole, I'm an introvert versus I'm an extrovert perspective, right. Some people are rejuvenated by being in community with people, and some people rejuvenate by being by themselves and retreating, right.

And so, finding out what works best for you. But I do want to make sure that we think about how we recover as communities too, not just as individual human beings. And how do we, as different leaders in our roles and responsibilities, whether you're a student, staff, or faculty, how do we ensure that there's time for recovery and repair so that we can rebuild trust and so that we can be on the same page, or we can better show up and support one another as a community as a whole. So I think that's kind of where I wanted to add my perspectives there.

Michelle Deutchman:

I am so appreciative of both of you, not just because you took the time but because these are really hard things to talk about. And it would've been easy to do another episode on the legality of speech, and there will be plenty of time for discussions of that. But I think it's important as a center dedicated to expression that we acknowledge the impact that, I mean, not everything that's happening on campus is speech, but a lot of it is, and a lot of it is protected speech. And I think we have to acknowledge and discuss what the impact of that can be.

And going back to, I can't remember which of you said this, this idea of responsibility that just... Oh, it was Katya saying, "You don't have to post. Think before you post." And I think it's the same thing, right. Helping not just students but all stakeholders in the campus and reminding them that, "Just because you have the right to say something doesn't mean you should." And I think sometimes we forget about that. And you both have been so generous with your advice and recommendations.

And as you know, the majority of our listeners, I think, are staff and administrators at institutions of higher ed. And so I don't know if there's just one more thing. It can be something you already said, it can be something you didn't have a chance to say that folks can take to their communities to help support well-being around sort of the stress and trauma that is a result, specifically maybe of this ugly speech that we're seeing all around us. So if there's maybe one thing to kind of close out, that would be great.

Dr. Katya Armistead:

One thing... Can I say a couple of things?

Michelle Deutchman:

You can, but try to really prioritize.

Dr. Katya Armistead:

Prioritize. I just a couple of days ago, was at a system-wide meeting with all of the UC ABCs and Dean of Students. And so I asked them about this. So some things that came up were we need to remind and educate ourselves about what free speech is. I think that this discourse about what we can say, what's protected, what's not is a really healthy way to move forward so that we have a better understanding of what can happen. And that is so important to share with our faculty, staff, and students. And I think it is a way to bring people together to have productive civil discourse.

What's happening right now in the world is so tough, and it is too hard to touch right now in terms of trying to unpack that and bring folks together to actually discuss just that. But I think this is a way to move us forward and bring people together and to wrestle with it and interrogate it. Someone said, I think it was one of the attorneys, the UC attorneys that was in the room with us said, "Think about what, five, 10 years ago, we would not do today. What kind of poster we would put on the wall or someone could put on the wall that we wouldn't even consider doing that today."

So the nuances, the understanding, that conversation, I think, is maybe a way forward to provide opportunities to model, to exchange ideas. And student affairs is in the heart of it with students. We are trying to discuss respect, space, room for groups for individuals on the campus, support for them. And I think that the other way to move forward is to get more involved on the academic side and have faculty lead some of these conversations, model civil discourse, reach across the aisle, do more. And what I'm going to do, especially in the new year, is to have more deep conversations with faculty and continue to learn and encourage folks to get involved in a productive way.

And just like this podcast, not get into the weeds of what's going on, but what's around it? How are we creating a fertile ground for relationship building and ways to have solid conversations? Then we're going to be able to have more empathy for the difference. So that's what my concrete action is, and in different ways, I hope that helps people think about, "Well, what can we be doing different? What can we talk about that still could be hard but is moving us forward?"

Michelle Deutchman:

Well, on the free speech education piece, you know I'm right there. So there's no pressure, Genie, but I think you get the final word.

Dr. Genie Kim:

I think, in the last week, something really resonated me in the various meetings that we've had, and it's really listening to our students and giving them an opportunity to share what their experiences are. And we had the opportunity or the pleasure of having our UC Student Association president and our UC Graduate Professional Council president share some remarks with a leadership group about what our students are experiencing on our campuses. And while they also disclose that they're not able to reflect all the different details that are happening across our system and what our students may be experiencing. And what I had heard from our students was a sentiment that we're moving too fast, right.

We're moving too fast to solve the problem, and we haven't paused to actually talk about what the problem is and unpack the problem and to... I wholeheartedly believe in what Katya was just saying. We need to slow down and have those conversations to unpack it in order for us to have that discourse and to talk through how we respond in these moments, right. I think it kind of resonates with me as a mental health and well-being practitioner is when you have these crucial conversations, you can't rush through solving the problem. And it really is pausing, having compassion, care showing up with empathy, and having those crucial conversations and giving space for those crucial conversations to happen rather than it be a top-down approach or whatever it might be.

Michelle Deutchman:

Well, both of you have sort of highlighted a lot of the same themes and threads, and some of what I hear is listen, pause, and reflect. And I think it's very interesting to be having taken the legal lens away and put a different lens on sort of what we come up with and I think that's important. And I am absolutely confident that the people who are lucky enough to hear this episode will be better equipped to help themselves and to help other people on the campus. And so I, again, just want to extend my gratitude and appreciation to both of you.

Dr. Katya Armistead:

Thank you, Michelle. Thank you for Melanie, and thank you, Genie. This was really, really enjoyable.

Dr. Genie Kim:

Agreed. Thank you all so much for hosting this podcast and bringing forward an opportunity to look at this from a different perspective or a different lens.

Michelle Deutchman:

This episode marks the end of season two of the SpeechMatters Podcast. We are grateful for you listening throughout the year and look forward to more dynamic conversations in 2024. If you have ideas for a topic you'd like discussed on SpeechMatters, send us an email at freespeechcenter@uci.edu. Wishing everyone a happy holiday season and we'll talk to you in the new year.