

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Illinois Student Senate  
250 Illini Union, MC-384  
1401 West Green Street  
Urbana, IL 61801



Peers and Colleagues,

Over the past month, my colleagues, friends, students, and I, have watched the debate and the following polarization engulf our campus and the media around the decision our administration made over the hiring process of Steven Salaita. I have watched my friends and peers split on the issue and make respectable arguments for and against the decision. But as the Student Body President at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and as a representative of the “Official Voice of the Student Body,” it is my duty and charge to advocate for the entirety of the Student Body. This means making our campus the best it can possibly be for my peers in the present and my peers in the future—as new Illini join our ranks.

The decision has deeply and rightfully angered members of our campus, especially my peers in the American Indian Studies Program who were left with no recourse. Those members of our community have every right to be upset, as a potential faculty member and his family had shared meals with them, were invited into their homes, and were welcomed to Illinois as we welcome everyone who steps foot on our campus. So of course when this decision was made under the circumstances that it was, our friends, peers, and colleagues became irate. It was unprecedented, surprising, and distressing.

In talking with a multitude of my fellow students about this, I heard complaints that they did not feel welcome at Illinois, and that their opinions on a controversial conflict had been marginalized and neglected. As a campus devoted to the principles of inclusivity, we must make it our top priority to make sure every student on our campus feels welcome, respected, and safe to engage in discourse. In the same note, as a campus, committed to the ideals of inclusivity and bound by the principles of shared governance, we must realize and respect the decision that Chancellor Wise has made as being from the same grounds of inclusivity.

At the absolute foundation of this University and campus community is the core principle of inclusivity. In my position as the Student Body President, but more importantly as a student and member of this campus community, I have joined thousands of my fellow students, faculty, staff, and administrators in committing to these five statements outlined in our Inclusive Illinois initiative:

- I will encourage the expression of different voices, perspectives, and ideas.
- I will challenge my own beliefs, opinions, and viewpoints.
- I will advocate for an accessible, safe, and respectful environment to enhance the living, learning, and working community at Illinois
- I will acknowledge and respect the multiple identities represented in each individual.
- I will demonstrate my commitment through my voice and my conduct.

These statements and the sheer amount of time, energy, and resources, our campus has put into developing a welcoming and inclusive community is a simple testament to the seriousness and amount of respect we give this fundamental principle.

In addressing the polarity on our campus in this present time, I think it most critical to reflect upon these statements. If a professor plainly states intolerance towards others, can we really say he will 'acknowledge and respect the multiple identities represented in each individual'? When a professor allegedly announces that he wishes almost certain death to civilians who live in a disputed land, can we really say that same professor can create an 'accessible, safe, and respectful environment to enhance the living, learning, and working community at Illinois'? In our day and age with digital communication, we must always be cognizant of our perception despite the intentions of a mere 140 characters.

At stake here is not the academic freedom and right to free speech of any individual, Chancellor Wise has already stated and recommitted to those fundamental principles of our education system. What is at stake is the integrity of our University, what is at stake is the community of our campus. When tension and anger are allowed to flourish and thrive, our campus becomes unstable, our relationships begin to polarize, and our inclusive community becomes the exact thing we were against in the first place.

So while I continue to encourage this discussion of differing opinions, and while I will continue to challenge my own beliefs, opinions, and viewpoints, I will also advocate creating an accessible, safe, and respectful environment to enhance the living, learning, and working community at Illinois. I will acknowledge and respect the multiple identities represented in each individual, as I continue to demonstrate my commitment to these principles through my voice and my conduct, as I have done in this letter and I will in all future endeavors. I do this because I believe in an inclusive Illinois, and I believe in a welcoming Illinois, and because I believe in this place I call home.

Sincerely,

Mitch Dickey  
Student Body President  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign