January 8, 2024

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the Viewpoint Representation and Expression Taskforce. In reflecting on the role and obligation we have to our students, faculty and colleagues, I was reminded of former University of Utah President David P. Gardner’s words in My Guiding Principles:

“The University is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas. Thus, it permits the freest expression of views before students, trusting to their good sense in passing judgment on these views. Only in this way can it best serve American democracy.”

In 2024, we must expand on President Gardner’s vision and ensure that our campus welcomes and respects the broad range of voices and perspectives of our students, as well as our faculty, staff and the communities we serve. It is in this spirit that I ask you to take on the important task of evaluating and assessing our campus climate related to respect and acceptance of varying ideological viewpoints.

The outcome of this work should be two-fold. First, in the next nine months provide me with the results and conclusions about our current campus climate based on survey research and focus groups with students, faculty and staff. Second, use those results to provide me a final report in the next 18 months with recommendations on how to strengthen our campus climate so that all voices and perspectives of our students, faculty, staff and community are welcomed and respected.

The full report should include:

- Results and conclusions about our current campus climate based on survey research and focus groups with students, faculty and staff
- A review and evaluation of policies and practices related to viewpoint diversity, with particular attention to the Code of Faculty Rights and Responsibilities, the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy and the Ethical Standards and Code of Conduct for staff – including recommendations for ensuring current policies are being followed and recommendations for updating or revising policies and practices
- Recommendations on future research the university should undertake on this issue
- Ongoing recommendations on a set of speakers, dialogues, forums and debates that model best behavior and assistance on implementing these ideas

Jason Perry, the university’s vice president for Government Relations and director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics, has agreed to chair this group. I have asked him to provide me with regular updates on your work.
Task force members:

- Jason Perry, Chair, Vice President for Government Relations
- Michele Ballantyne, Associate General Counsel, Office of General Counsel
- Paul Cassell, Professor of Law
- Maria Garciacz, Board of Trustees
- Jeff Herring, Chief Human Resources Officer
- Bill Hesterly, Professor of Business
- Harriet Hopf, Professor of Anesthesiology, incoming Academic Senate President (2024-2025)
- Jason Ramirez, Dean of Students
- Hollis Robbins, Dean, College of Humanities
- Jared Rutter, Professor of Biochemistry
- Bassam Salem, Board of Trustees
- Mary Ann Villarreal, Vice President for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- Marie Wintriss, Chair-elect Staff Council
- Undergraduate student representative to be named
- Graduate student representative to be named

Additional members may be added as needed.

Thank you again for your willingness to serve on this task force over the next 18 months and for making time to engage in this important work.

Taylor Randall
President, University of Utah