Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students:

Last January I commented that while harassment and abuse are sadly facts of life in our society, the university has a special responsibility to defend both human dignity and freedom of thought, and this responsibility should be reflected in our relationships with one another.

I had in mind the deplorable incidents of harassment, verbal abuse, and discrimination resulting in confrontations among the members of university communities. Now we face a new threat. As each of you realizes, our nation is engaged in a conflict in the Middle East which by its very nature touches our institution. It is only natural that we should examine this issue and explore its policies, its repercussions, and its effects on each of us, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. At the same time, we must guard against any breach of freedom of expression or compromise of human dignity, particularly any that might be directed against individuals, who for one reason or another hold different opinions about this conflict.

The university represents the very highest pinnacle of our country’s fundamental guarantee of free expression and inquiry. We often refer to this as academic freedom, and this freedom extends to all members of our community the right to express their opinions, the right to assemble, and the right to responsibly demonstrate for their views. Irresponsible acts of intolerance, personal abuse or vandalism are not acceptable in an academic community. Each of us, no matter how diverse in origin or opinion, is a member of a single community pledged to treat each other with respect, with understanding, and with a commonality of purpose.

I invite each of you to join me in reaffirming our commitment to the freedom and protection of all individuals regardless of their views, their ethnicity, race, gender, age, sex, or national origin.

Sincerely,

Warren J. Baker