

December 5, 2011

California State University, Northridge has received a number of communications objecting to content on the web pages of one of our professors, David Klein, expressing his personal views on Israel. These communications have questioned whether such content violates the web use policies of Cal State Northridge as a public institution and whether such views go beyond accepted norms of free speech.

The University takes such concerns very seriously. Thus, as soon as we became aware of these concerns and the web pages, I requested a full administrative review. In particular, the review considered whether the web content is in violation of California State University (CSU) or Cal State Northridge web use policies. While the review raised many difficult issues, it found no such violations. This conclusion was affirmed by CSU legal counsel.

While we recognize this finding will not satisfy everyone, the conclusions are based on the important tenets of academic freedom and free speech, which are central to the values and traditions of academia and, indeed, a democratic society. We encourage our professors—as well as students and all members of the campus community—to express their points of view, even when many others may disagree with them or even find them offensive.

This determination does not mean that the University supports or endorses Professor Klein's views. In fact, Professor Klein is clearly speaking for himself and does not represent Cal State Northridge as a whole. The University, as a forum for the free expression of ideas and points of view, takes no position on the individual expressions of ideas by faculty, staff, or students. But the University does uphold and preserve the principles of academic freedom—and Professor Klein's right to express his views. Our review affirmed that this right extends to the use of an individual's web pages, as part of the University website, as a vehicle for expression.

Cal State Northridge is proud of its work in support of Jewish students and the Jewish community, which includes a respected Jewish Studies Program. Indeed, the coordinator of our Jewish Studies Program and the interim director of our campus Hillel program released a statement about this issue, available at the [CSUN Hillel website](#), which affirms there is “strong support for Israel on the CSUN campus, and our Jewish students report feeling quite safe.” Our campus hosts a Students for Israel group, an Israel Fellow who arranges programs connected to Israel, and many Israel-connected activities that are featured on the CSUN Hillel website and the CSUN Hillel Facebook page.

I share with those who have expressed concerns a personal discomfort with some of the material on Professor Klein's web pages, especially because the University is celebrated for its diversity and its spirit of inclusion. As core values, the University also upholds academic freedom, eschews censorship, and defends rights to express points of view. For all these reasons we must tolerate the presence of these web pages.

I appreciate the many expressions of concern we have received about this issue—it is appropriate for all of us to speak out and even condemn ideas and views we find offensive. Few issues at a university are as perplexing to deal with as the exercise of freedom of speech. But respecting and tolerating such views, even those that may be anathema to us personally, are essential to a free society.

Jolene Koester
President, California State University, Northridge