

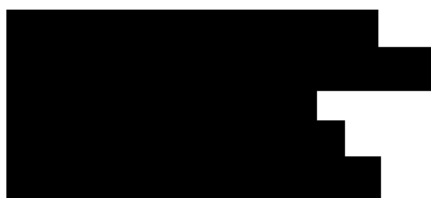


CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA

Office of the President

May 10, 2021

Sent via email to complainants:



Dear [REDACTED]:

By electronic copy of your May 3rd letter, I appreciate you advising me of the concerns that you have raised to Chancellor Castro, CSU Board of Trustees, and the California State Auditor. Please know that I take these issues and your concerns extremely seriously, particularly given my own abiding commitment to earnestly act with integrity in carrying out my duties and responsibilities as President of Cal Poly Pomona.

As you are likely aware, several of the matters referred to in your letter remain under active investigation and/or relate to confidential personnel or student matters, prohibiting or limiting the disclosure of details related to these cases. I can certainly understand how having limited or incomplete information about situations that may have both a law enforcement aspect as well as crossover with other divisions on campus or at the Chancellor's Office, may lead to confusion or distrust about how issues are handled and ultimately resolved. It is my hope that we can work together to share perspectives and clear up misunderstandings, and I invite further dialogue and collaboration across units to achieve this goal.

I also want to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for the work of the University Police Department (UPD) in providing a critically important function as stewards and protectors of the safety of the Cal Poly Pomona community. As I have expressed many times over the tenure of my Presidency, I respect and value the contributions that each of you and your fellow sworn officers and non-sworn staff make to the University every day. The campus relies on your expertise, professionalism, and responsiveness.

And as we seek to recover from the pandemic and actively repopulate our campus in the coming months, your continued leadership on safety and security efforts and your active collaboration with the campus divisions are even more essential. As one who embraces the philosophy of "continuous improvement," Vice President Gonzales and I are eager to work with the department to address both the challenges and opportunities

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in safety, security, and service to our community. This is in alignment with the University Police's Statement of being "dedicated to providing professional police services to the campus and partnering with our community to support the academic mission of the university."

In your letter you reference two instances of alleged fiscal impropriety. Regrettably, such cases are not unique to Cal Poly Pomona; however, I am saddened and disappointed that they have occurred during my Presidency. My approach to addressing such cases is to consistently hold those individuals with authority and responsibility accountable, including myself, and remain committed to employing all measures to learn from past mistakes and minimize the likelihood of reoccurrence. When gaps in our leadership, policies and practices allow for such transgressions, a thorough investigation provides us with opportunities to strengthen internal controls. If circumstances merit criminal prosecution, this course of action is vigorously pursued.

Of the cases you reference, the first (2017) was the subject of a CSU special investigation by Audit and Advisory Services, for which the results were publicly disclosed:

<https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/transparency-accountability/audit-reports/Documents/special-investigation/2017/17201SpecialInvestigationPomona.pdf>

As outlined in the special investigation report, when this matter was brought to my attention, I immediately requested an investigation by Audit and Advisory Services that was then approved by the Chair of the Board of Trustees' Committee on Audit. The investigation revealed that expenditures made from the particular Cal Poly Pomona Foundation program accounts appeared to be allowable based on the source of funds used, which constrained our ability to take certain personnel actions including referring the matter to a prosecuting authority. However, the investigation also identified irregularities resulting in recommendations summarized at the conclusion of the investigation report. In response, the campus and Foundation swiftly implemented all recommended corrective actions in 2018 and communicated confirmation of those actions to Audit and appropriate campus stakeholders.

With regard to the second case referenced (2020), I, too, was sickened to learn about the embezzlement of significant funds by a now former Foundation employee. From the moment the questionable expenditures were discovered, I ensured that the matter was reported to the Audit Committee of the CSU Board of Trustees in compliance with the procedures set forth in [Executive Order 1104](#) and the campus has continued to fulfill all EO disclosure and reporting requirements.

In every instance of campus reporting on this case, I felt it was imperative to distinguish that the alleged impropriety took place in the Cal Poly Pomona Foundation – a separate 501(c)(3) non-profit auxiliary organization from the University – and did not involve theft of public or state funds nor student tuition dollars. In doing so, my intention was not to

cover up or obfuscate such wrongdoing – rather, to accurately convey the context for such occurrences, especially in matters concerning CPP’s stewardship of public resources. As a result of this case, we used the opportunity to fully investigate the Foundation’s business and accounting practices and to strengthen internal fiscal controls to prevent future improprieties. There is a new Executive Director and new Director of Financial Services/CFO of the Foundation, who are engaged in the review process and are committed to implementing improvements to internal processes. The Audit Committee of the Foundation Board of Directors was also made aware of the case. The matter was appropriately referred to local and federal law enforcement authorities, and throughout the process, the Foundation and the University have cooperated fully with the ongoing criminal investigation.

Your letter also discusses a pending matter involving a student that remains the subject of a current [EO 1097](#) investigation. While the student has chosen to speak publicly about his case in different forums and the Poly Post, a student-run newspaper, has published articles sharing their perspectives, the University is not in a position to comment on the details of the matter beyond what has been offered in existing statements by Vice President for Student Affairs, Christina Gonzales, as it is subject to privacy, confidentiality, FERPA and other regulations.

Your letter referenced that I routinely refer to Cal Poly Pomona students as my “babies and children.” While I do not refer to them as “babies,” indeed, I have referred to students as my “children” – not because I wish to diminish their maturity, nor to suggest that I am a surrogate parent – but because I consider the role of the University (as I experienced at my alma mater) to be akin to an extended family in helping to further build the intellect, character, capacity, and resilience of all our students and supporting their development in a caring manner, while also holding them accountable.

I recall that the first time I made such a statement was several years ago in response to a parent’s inquiry as to whether my husband and I had children. I stated, “No, but I have 24,000 at the University, and I work diligently to support their academic and personal growth.” I make it a point to convey this to the parents of our first-generation students, to our students who grew up in foster care or group homes, and those who are struggling. At the same time, I believe it is equally important that students understand that their behavior can result in negative consequences, including campus disciplinary actions.

I feel compelled to address your characterization of my leadership style as one based on fear, as it is antithetical to my core ideals and philosophy. On any given day, a president is faced with myriad decisions, both small and large. I am guided in this work by my beacon statement developed in my first administrative role: “To remain *Student-Centered, Faculty and Staff-Focused and Community Minded*”. This statement grounds me, reminds me of the community that I serve, and assures that I continue to advance the development and interests of students, faculty, and staff. Ultimately, our institutional

strategic plan is about people – and my beacon statement is a continual reminder of the centrality of people in every decision. This ethos is embodied in my efforts to support a developmental approach to supporting and advancing faculty and staff skills, competencies, leadership, and career growth. Recognizing the largely transactional function of our human resources division, in 2018, I created a new unit “[Employee and Organizational Development and Advancement](#)” (EODA) focused on providing the support, training, and resources to inspire and enable employees to use their skills and talents in the pursuit of excellence and to act with purpose and passion to serve the University’s mission.

I do expect and support accountability at all levels and leadership that is strategic, results-oriented, and demonstrates the values of the University and the valuing of students, faculty, and staff. A “fearful environment” is not a productive or healthy workplace, moreover, it would not help us attain our vision and goals. I am diligent in my efforts to acknowledge and express my appreciation for the work and commitment of the campus community and will continue to do so.

Finally, given the recent announcement of Chief Dario Robinson’s retirement, I certainly appreciate that the impending leadership transition may leave the officers and staff of UPD feeling unsettled. I know that you are committed to engaging constructively with the campus to address areas for improvement and I believe we can do this through an effective partnership that includes forthright communication between my leadership team, campus stakeholders, UPD, and myself. I am proud of the work that we are collectively doing to strengthen trust through the development and work of the Police Advisory Task Force, which is expected to be on all the CSU campuses. I seek your ongoing participation and input to collaborate on strategies for effectively serving our campus community and fulfilling our mission during these unprecedented times. I trust that future concerns may be addressed through our continued dialogue and thank you for the opportunity to provide this response.

Sincerely,



Soraya M. Coley
President

Cc: Joseph I. Castro, Chancellor, California State University
Board of Trustees, California State University
Norma J. Torres, Congresswoman, 35th Congressional District
Julie Doi, Director Labor Employee Relations, Office of the Chancellor
Christina Gonzales, Vice President for Student Affairs, Cal Poly Pomona