

## Letter of Support For Erika and Nicholas Christakis

As faculty colleagues we wish to express our strong support of the right of Erika and Nicholas Christakis to free speech and freedom of intellectual expression. Free speech of course includes the right to express opinions that are opposed to what may generally be termed liberal or progressive values, but that is not the issue in the current situation. The email that Erika Christakis sent to the Silliman community did not express support for racist expressions, but rather focused primarily on the question of whether monitoring and criticizing such expression should be done in a top-down manner, when in fact the community involved is a group of college students. One can differ with her suggestion that administrative bodies should *not* play such an oversight role at Yale, but the suggestion itself clearly does not constitute support for racist expressions. We are deeply troubled that this modest attempt to ask people to consider the issue of self-monitoring vs. bureaucratic supervision has been misinterpreted, and in some cases recklessly distorted, as support for racist speech; and hence as justification for demanding the resignation of our colleagues from their posts at Silliman. We are pleased that President Salovey and Dean Holloway have expressed their support for them to continue in their roles.

While the university stands for many values, none is more central than the value of free expression of ideas. Historically our university has championed this notion, as expressed in the Woodward Report forty years ago: “because no other institution combines the discovery and dissemination of basic knowledge with teaching, few need assign such high priority to [freedom of expression]”. A crucial component of free expression is the possibility of open and civil discussions, without vilifying those who disagree with one’s own viewpoint. Our support for these principles is not in conflict with opposition to racism and respect for diversity. All of us, together with the Christakises, condemn any racist elements on campus and strongly support efforts to further diversify Yale’s faculty, staff, administration, and student body. In fact, in the case of the Christakises, their work has been more directly oriented toward the social justice than the work of many other members of the Yale faculty. For example, Nicholas Christakis worked for many years as a hospice doctor, making house visits to underserved populations in Chicago. Progressive values and social justice are not advanced by scapegoating those who share those values. We join with the Christakises in appealing for discussion based on “positive intent”: the assumption that all sides are coming to the table in good faith and with compassion.

Signed:

Julia Adams, Professor of Sociology  
Rolena Adorno, Professor of Spanish  
Wendell Bell, Professor of Sociology, Emeritus  
Robert Blocker, Dean, Yale School of Music

Paul Bloom, Professor of Psychology  
Scott Boorman, Professor of Sociology  
Gary Brudvig, Professor of Chemistry  
Ty Cannon, Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry  
James Choi, Professor of Finance  
Nancy Close, Assistant Professor, Yale Child Study Center  
Paul Cleary, Professor of Public Health and Sociology  
Ronald Coifman, Professor of Mathematics  
Julie Dorsey, Professor of Computer Science  
Ronald Duman, Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobiology  
Menachem Elimelech, Professor of Chemical Engineering  
Rong Fan, Associate Professor of Biomedical Engineering  
Joan Feigenbaum, Professor and Chair, Computer Science  
Paul Fleury, Professor of Applied Physics, Dean Emeritus of Engineering  
Paul Forscher, Professor, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology  
David Gelernter, Professor of Computer Science  
Alessandro Gomez, Professor of Mechanical Engineering and Materials  
Science  
Sohrab Ismail-Beigi, Professor of Applied Physics  
Sigrun Kahl, Assistant Professor of Political Science and Sociology  
Marianne LaFrance, Professor of Psychology  
James Leckman, Professor, Yale Child Study Center  
Paul Lombroso, Professor, Yale Child Study Center  
Costas Meghir, Professor of Economics  
Thomas Near, Associate Professor of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology  
Laura Niklason, Professor of Biomedical Engineering  
Daniel Prober, Professor of Applied Physics  
Vladimir Rokhlin, Professor of Computer Science  
Brian Scassellati, Professor of Computer Science  
Martin Schwartz, Professor of Medicine and Biomedical Engineering  
R. Shankar, Professor of Physics  
Frederick Shic, Assistant Professor, Yale Child Study Center  
Edward A. Snyder, Dean of the School of Management  
Olav Sorenson, Professor of Management and Sociology  
Daniel Spielman, Professor of Computer Science  
Stephen Stearns, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
A. Douglas Stone, Professor of Applied Physics  
Mary Schwab-Stone, Associate Professor Emeritus, Yale Child Study Center  
Richard Sutton, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine  
Leandros Tassioulas, Professor of Electrical Engineering.  
Flora Vaccarino, Professor, Yale Child Study Center  
Noel Valis, Professor of Spanish  
Paul van Tassel, Professor of Chemical Engineering  
Marta Wells, Senior Lecturer, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
Craig Wright, Professor of Music

Harrison Zhou, Professor of Statistics

Although we appreciate any expressions of support, we are restricting signers to current or emeritus Yale Faculty. If you are a Yale faculty member and are interested in adding your name, please [click here](#). If you are not a Yale faculty member but want to express support for the views expressed here, we encourage you to organize a similar effort.