

Personal message from President Fuchs

Dear UF community,

Over the past several months our nation's great public research universities have increasingly become the targets of individuals and groups who intend to gain national publicity for their messages of racism and hate by inciting protest, which has led to violence. We have watched this occur at the University of Virginia and the University of California, Berkeley. Now, one of these individuals, Richard Spencer, a white nationalist from the National Policy Institute, and his followers intend to do the same here at the University of Florida on Thursday, October 19.

The values of our universities are not shared by Mr. Spencer, the National Policy Institute or his followers. Our campuses are places where people from all races, origins and religions are valued equally, welcomed and treated with love, not hate. Our mission is to engage in the world's preeminent scholarship and education for the public good, not to sow lies, discord and violence.

No one at our university invited Mr. Spencer, nor is anyone at UF sponsoring this event. UF has been clear and consistent in its denunciation of all hate speech and racism, and in particular the racist speech and white-nationalist values of Mr. Spencer. I personally find the doctrine of white supremacy abhorrent and denounce all forms of racism and hate.

If you are like me, I expect you are surprised and even shocked to learn that UF is required by law to allow Mr. Spencer to speak his racist views on our campus, and that we are not allowed by law to bill him for the full costs of keeping our campus safe, which exceed more than a half million dollars. We have prepared a Q&A to answer the numerous questions and misperceptions around Mr. Spencer and his event. You will find a link at freespeech.ufl.edu, which I encourage you to review.

I urge our community to do two things:

First, do not provide Mr. Spencer and his followers the spotlight they are seeking. They are intending to attract crowds and provoke a reaction in order to draw the media. I urge everyone to stay away from Mr. Spencer and his followers and the Phillips Center where he will speak and the media will be assembled on October 19. By shunning him and his followers we will block his attempt for further visibility.

Second, although I urge you to avoid the Spencer event, I ask that you not let Mr. Spencer's message of hate and racism go unchallenged. Speak up for your values and the values of our university. Make it clear that messages of hate on our campus are contrary to those values. Mr. Spencer's message is disproportionately hurtful to members of our Gator community who are targets of hate and violence simply because of their skin color, religion, culture, sexual orientation or beliefs. Those of us in the majority must speak up for those in the minority and make our voice of love and support heard.

Our student leaders planned over the next several weeks a series of events, tagged #TogetherUF, promoting dialogue, education and the embrace of our shared humanity. The first event, set for Wednesday, October 11, is a panel titled, "A Conversation on the First Amendment" in the Rion Ballroom of the Reitz Union from 5 to 6:30 p.m. I plan to be there.

Members of the Gator family please be understanding, caring and supportive—taking care of yourselves and each other—particularly in the next few weeks. As one of our nation's great public research universities, with values that are contrary to all that Mr. Spencer represents, we refuse to be defined by this event. We will overcome this external threat to our university and our values. We will become an even stronger community and an even greater university.

Warmly,

Kent Fuchs
President

University of Florida