

Diversity



California State University Fresno named Neil H. Gibson, an agricultural business graduate, as 2005 President Medalist. Gibson, who represents the College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology as the Dean's Medalist, is a Smittcamp Family Honors College Scholar and Kenneth L. Maddy Scholar. He maintained a 4.0 GPA in his agricultural business major and classical studies minor. Gibson was also selected as one of 60 Phi Kappa Phi 2005 Graduate Fellowship recipients in the nation. He will pursue a master's degree at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, a Johns Hopkins University division, located in Washington, D.C. The President's Medal winner, one of two that designate the university's top students, is selected from the nine undergraduate Dean's Medalists who represent the academic colleges and schools and the Division of Student Affairs.

Campus Climate and Diversity

California State University, Fresno is not immune to issues of racial and gender intolerance that have surfaced across the country. While we are fortunate that the university has not had to deal with some of the more blatant aspects of racial and gender discrimination, these issues are very important to us.

As a university community, we have taken steps to become more sensitive to issues of race and gender. We must continue to be vigilant and not tolerate improper behavior that is motivated and directed at individuals or groups based solely on these criteria. I would like to underscore the fact that this type of wrongful behavior will not be tolerated on our campus. Any instance of this kind, or any

that intends to abridge the rights of anyone on campus, will be investigated and the appropriate action taken, including legal action when necessary.

As a university, we have the clear obligation to ensure equal access and opportunity for all to participate in education and university life, whether as students, faculty, or staff. We need everyone's participation in our efforts to promote an atmosphere of understanding and cooperation that is free from bigotry and intolerance.

In closing, let me direct your attention to the statement in the next column that I fully endorse.

John D. Welty, President

The California State University reflects California's rich cultural diversity. The varied backgrounds of students, faculty, and staff enrich the university's intellectual life and create its unique community.

While the university views diversity as a great source of its strength, some people on campus, as elsewhere in society, feel threatened by those who are different and act in disregard of the personal dignity and rights of others. Discrimination and harassment have no place in a university community. They limit the educational aspirations of students, interfere with the performance of faculty and staff, and damage the environment of tolerance and mutual regard that must prevail for a university to fulfill its mission.

The university is therefore committed to maintaining an environment free from discrimination and harassment. To fulfill this commitment, the university will work to prevent discrimination from occurring and will ensure that federal and state laws as well as university regulations prohibiting discrimination are fully enforced.

Demeaning and gratuitously offensive conduct sometimes takes expressive forms that, although repugnant, cannot be prohibited or punished. Both the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States and Article I, Section 2 of the California Constitution restrict the university's power to limit free speech. To do so, even in the case of speech that is offensive and demeaning, would undermine basic principles of discourse fundamental to any university.

As an educational institution, the university will use its intellectual and persuasive powers to discourage offensive and harassing speech from occurring and to encourage civil exchange. The university will attempt to teach its students and employees to listen as well as to speak, and to do both with an open mind. This is consistent with the university's mission to foster dialogue that educates students and prepares them for effective citizenship. The mission requires respect for differing viewpoints, but does not give license for demeaning language and harassing behavior that stifle free exchange of ideas and compromise the university's educational goals.

Respect throughout the university for the dignity and rights of others, including the right to be free from discrimination and harassment and the right to speak freely, is essential to creating and maintaining an environment conducive to learning.

— From *Campus Climate: Toward Appreciating Diversity*, a report prepared for the CSU, 1990.