Dear Campus Community:

The past few days have been difficult for Cal State LA. But they have also been illustrations of our passionate devotion to social justice and the public good.

The visit by Ben Shapiro yesterday sparked confrontations and a contentious debate. In the days leading up to Mr. Shapiro’s visit, there were threats and expressions of fear. Because of my concern for campus safety, I proposed a rescheduled event that would be civil and inclusive, and in which Mr. Shapiro and other speakers could offer their perspectives in an organized forum.

But Mr. Shapiro and the student group supporting him insisted on holding the originally scheduled event. He was allowed to speak, for two reasons: 1) as a public university, we prize freedom of speech, even when its content is disagreeable or offensive; 2) safety and security could have been at greater risk had we attempted to disallow his speech.

A group of students have emphasized to me that allowing Mr. Shapiro’s visit signaled my lack of concern for their safety. I spoke with them last night, and tried to explain that we took deliberate measures to provide enhanced security, respect the presence of protestors, and provide Mr. Shapiro the small auditorium that his student supporters had reserved. As I conduct a thorough review of this event—including input I have received from a number of participants and observers—I will continue to evaluate the University’s capacity for providing our community with safe venues at all times. As part of this process, I have commissioned a more thoroughgoing risk assessment for University events, including the event plan for safety and security, and the roles and responsibilities of campus Public Safety officers. I remain firm in my commitment to ensure the well-being of students, faculty and staff, and I want to assure the University community that safety and security are among my highest priorities, and will remain so in the months and years to come.

I look forward to working with each of you to maintain the well-being of our campus community, even at our most challenging moments.

Sincerely,

William A. Covino
President

Emailed to the University community on Friday, Feb. 26, 2016.