April 12, 2013

Dear Member of the Trojan Family:

As director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at USC, I would like to respond to you personally regarding your questions about my colleague, Darry Sragow. Darry is part of our Unruh Fellows program, a group of approximately fifty political professionals who represent both major political parties and a range of ideologies. Our Fellows provide a valuable resource for our students, not just by providing them insight into the world of practical politics, government and public service, but also giving them the opportunity to be exposed to a wide range of opinions and analysis from across the political spectrum.

First, let me give you some background about myself. Before going into academia I served as an advisor to several Republican candidates and officeholders, including working as the national director of communications for the 2000 presidential campaign of John McCain and for five years as chief media spokesman for California Gov. Pete Wilson. Since coming to USC, I have worked hard to bring a range of political voices to campus. I am currently team-teaching a course with Bill Simon, the Republican nominee for California governor in 2002. Former Republican legislators Keith Olberg, Rod Pacheco, and Tony Strickland are among our Fellows, along with several of the state's leading GOP strategists and consultants. Our programming is all done in a completely bipartisan manner, with one Democratic and one Republican guest on our panels, along with one student representative from each of the two major parties. I also direct the USC Dornsife / Los Angeles Times statewide Poll and the USC Price / LA Times Los Angeles Poll, both of which have earned the respect of media and political professionals for accuracy and lack of bias. By design, every poll represents the collaborative work of two polling firms, one Republican and one Democratic.

We believe in the value of using lecturers with real-world political experience, all of whom are encouraged to state their affiliation and allegiances openly. I understand why you were offended by the excerpts of Darry's lecture that were posted online. His choice of words was deeply regrettable, as he himself has acknowledged.

But I believe that whether our students end up supporting the views they hear from our guests or opposing them, or whether or not they choose to pursue a career in politics or public service, we do them a disservice by not exposing them to the realities of the political world. We also sell our very bright students short if we assume them to be easily influenced by a single lecturer's opinions, and we encourage all our students to challenge lecturers and ideas with which they disagree. That is an essential part of the classroom experience.

I would like to thank you for expressing your concern and giving me an opportunity to respond. I hope you will join us on campus in the future for one of our programs in order to see our students take on the challenges of political involvement.

Best regards,

Dan Schnur