



AEN Statement on the Violent Protests at University of California, Berkeley

February 6, 2017

The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) condemns the violent protests mounted against a scheduled speech by *Breitbart* editor Milo Yiannopoulos on the University of California, Berkeley campus last week. Despite elaborate provisions made by Berkeley leaders to protect the right of Yiannopoulos to speak at a registered student event and at the same time to permit and encourage peaceful protest, violence on the campus forced leaders to cancel the event owing to legitimate safety concerns.

AEN is an organization of over 400 American college and university faculty on more than 160 campuses nationwide committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression. True support for freedom of expression means support for speech on campus even by those whose views may be repugnant or controversial. Supporters of universities as places of free and open exchange must oppose attempts to forcibly disrupt sanctioned campus events because of disagreement with their content. No free speech right exists to deny others their rights to speak or to hear. At the same time, we also support peaceful protest as free speech and expression, which too is protected by the First Amendment.

We applaud the initiative taken in advance by Chancellor Nicholas Dirks, who supported these ideals [when he issued a statement](#) affirming the university's commitment to freedom of expression and to tolerance, inclusion and diversity.

We also acknowledge that, as Chancellor Dirks has stated, most students protested peacefully but a group of more than 100 individuals clad in black and using paramilitary tactics acted to shut the event down.

Pending further investigation into what transpired, we think the university upheld the canons of free expression and acted consistently with its free speech tradition.