

# Words that Work in TOUGH CAMPUS MOMENTS



## A Guide to Navigating Social and Political Issues

### Why Words Matter More Than Ever

Higher Education leaders are expected to be thoughtful, responsive, and clear—even in moments of controversy or confusion. Whether you're navigating student protests, political pressures, campus incidents, or emotionally charged national conversations, *how* you communicate is just as important as *what* you say.

This guide offers language that builds trust, centers clarity, and keeps dialogue open—even when the situation is tense.

### Part 1: The Principles Behind the Phrases

Before you choose your words, keep these five principles in mind:

#### 1. Clarity over Perfection

Say something clear rather than trying to say everything. You can always follow up later.

#### 2. Center People, Not Policy

Policies matter, but people remember how your words made them feel. Acknowledge emotion before explanation.

#### 3. Speak with, Not at

Invite dialogue—even in a statement. It shows humility and strengthens credibility.

#### 4. Name the Tension (Without Fueling It)

You can't diffuse what you won't acknowledge. Don't ignore tension—frame it calmly and constructively.

## **5. Pace Over Pressure**

Not everything needs to be said immediately. Fast is helpful—but only if it's also thoughtful.

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## **Part 2: Situational Scripts and Talking Points**

Here are sample phrases you can adapt for real moments on campus:

### **When There's a Polarizing National Event (e.g., Election, Supreme Court Decision)**

#### **What to say:**

*"We recognize that today's news is affecting members of our campus community in different—and often deeply personal—ways. We are committed to maintaining an environment where people feel safe expressing their perspectives, and where empathy, listening, and civil dialogue remain our shared values."*

#### **Optional addition:**

*"Resources are available for those who need space to process or discuss these issues. We encourage our community to show care for one another during this time."*

### **When Students or Faculty Organize a Protest or Demonstration**

#### **What to say:**

*"We support the right of our community members to express their views peacefully. As a university, our mission includes fostering civic engagement and critical thinking—even when it's uncomfortable."*

#### **If you need to clarify boundaries:**

*"We ask that all demonstrations remain respectful and do not disrupt academic or operational functions. We're committed to upholding both freedom of expression and our shared responsibilities as a community."*

## **When a Crisis or Incident Occurs (e.g., bias-related, violence, major disruption)**

### **What to say immediately:**

*"We are aware of [brief, accurate description of event] and are actively gathering more information. Our first priority is the safety and well-being of our campus community. We will provide updates as soon as we are able."*

### **Follow-up language:**

*"We recognize that this situation may bring up fear, frustration, or concern for many. We are committed to transparency, compassion, and action as we navigate this together."*

## **When Asked About a Politically Divisive Issue (and You're Walking a Line)**

### **What to say:**

*"We understand that this topic touches on deeply held beliefs. Our role as a higher education institution is not to take sides, but to uphold spaces for respectful dialogue, inquiry, and learning."*

### **Or:**

*"As a leader, my responsibility is to ensure our entire community feels seen, valued, and safe. That includes holding space for diverse viewpoints—even when they're in tension."*

## **When Addressing Tension Within a Team or Department**

### **What to say:**

*"I've noticed that conversations have felt harder lately—and I want us to talk about that. My goal isn't to assign blame, but to rebuild trust and ensure we're moving forward together."*

### **If you're the leader:**

*"If I've contributed to this in any way, I want to own that. I'm here to listen, learn, and lead better."*

## Part 3: Messaging Framework You Can Use in the Moment

When you're under pressure and need to speak quickly, use this simple 3-part structure:

**Acknowledge → Affirm → Anchor**

### Example:

"We know today's announcement has stirred strong emotions across our campus. **(Acknowledge)**

We want every student and staff member to feel heard and supported. **(Affirm)**

Our commitment remains to respectful dialogue, learning, and the safety of our community. **(Anchor)**"

This framework helps you show empathy, clarity, and leadership without rushing into defensiveness or avoidance.

### Conclusion: Your Voice is Leadership

As a higher education leader, your voice doesn't need to have all the answers—but it does need to be present, grounded, and human. Words that work aren't perfect—they're clear, courageous, and rooted in care for the people you're leading.

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## You Don't Have to Figure It Out Alone

If this guide resonated with you, that's no accident. Emotional intelligence and courageous communication aren't soft skills—they're survival skills for leaders navigating complex teams, rising tension, and rapid change. The good news? These skills can be learned. And you don't have to go it alone.

At **Eremos Leadership**, we've helped universities, corporations, and local government agencies build emotionally intelligent cultures where people feel heard, respected, and motivated to do their best work—even in the hard moments.

Our **Leadership Communications Workshop Series** is the natural next step. Designed for leaders and teams who want real results—not fluff—these three

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### About Eremos Leadership

Eremos Leadership equips leaders to communicate with clarity, lead with empathy, and navigate complex moments with confidence. Whether you’re navigating change, rebuilding trust, or responding to high-stakes moments, we create spaces where real conversation can happen—and progress can take root. Our workshops, coaching, and communication tools are designed to support the human side of leadership: the tension, the relationships, the culture beneath the strategy. Working with Eremos feels less like a training and more like a turning point.

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