

CAUSA Central American United Student Association

To whom it may concern:

This letter is written on behalf of a diverse sector of the CSUN community including the Central American United Student Association (CAUSA) who are concerned about the event that took place during a campus screening of the film “Apocalypto.” On Thursday, March 22, Central American Studies professor Dr. Alicia Estrada, along with Felipe Perez, a member of the Mayan community, were escorted out of the screening event after questioning the film’s director, Mel Gibson, during the open Q&A forum about the sources he used and the barbaric manner in which the Mayan people were portrayed. These concerns were met with a slew of curses from Mel Gibson, booing and rude comments such as, “This is America, speak English,” from the audience, and Dr. Estrada being removed from the event. It was evident to the audience that throughout Dr. Estrada’s commentary she never offended, shouted, cursed, or acted violently towards Mr. Gibson she only questioned him. The treatment that Dr. Estrada received by Mel Gibson and members of the audience was not only disrespectful, but reflects poorly on the faculty members of the CTVA department, the sponsors: CSUN Cinematheque, and raises serious concerns about the University’s commitment to academic freedom.

The organizers of the event exercised poor judgment and demonstrated unfair treatment by removing Dr. Estrada from the event. Professor Estrada had the right to attend the event that was open to the public and voice her professional opinion. These actions are aligned with Article 1 in the University’s mission Statement; “We encourage intellectual curiosity and protect the multiple expressions of academic freedom.”

Traditionally, college campuses are a place where intellectual discussions take place. This institution should provide a safe environment to challenge assumptions that are held by society and test their academic validity. Given that this event took place at a public university, it was an appropriate place for Dr. Estrada to raise awareness of the negative way that “Apocalypto” portrayed the Mayan people. Dr. Estrada’s removal from the event indicated that the organizers of this event fail to recognize a diverse spectrum of academic viewpoints. A strong message was sent in which constructive criticism that is based on solid research of the Mayan community makes one, as Mr. Gibson expressed, “an (expletive) troublemaker”.

CAUSA would like to thank Dr. Estrada and the Mayan community for raising valid concerns, even though they were dismissed without any serious consideration. As members of the CSUN community, we support Dr. Estrada’s efforts to educate students and the public about the past and present condition of Mayan communities.

As a group of students in a distinguished academic setting, we understand and emphasize everybody’s ability to freely express themselves whether in regular discussion or debate. We openly discuss these and other issues in our Central American Studies classes, and invite others to participate.