

Jennifer Eagan
President
California Faculty Association
1110 K Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-2716

Dear President Eagan:

13 February 2019

I am writing to you on behalf of the HSU-ERFA Coordinating Council to express our concern about the lead article in the January 30, 2019 issue of *CFA Headlines*, the online newspaper of the California Faculty Association. The article was titled "[CFA to Trustees: Seek Justice for Josiah, better protect students of color.](#)" We have read, and appreciate, your letter to René Byrd, head of CFA at Humboldt State. In it you say, referring to the *Headlines* article, that "we can be a bit overzealous in our rhetoric when seeking justice"; and you promise to be "much more careful vetting" CFA publications in the future. We also appreciate your comment that "HSU is a beautiful and unique campus, and that the racism faced by students and the threat of violence against people of color is everywhere."

We have also read and appreciate the CFA Humboldt Executive Board's message. The *Headlines* article quotes James Thomas, a Cal State LA professor, who calls Humboldt County "Murder Mountain," a reference to the Netflix series about murders in the in the cannabis-growing region near Alderpoint, a remote region of southern Humboldt. The Humboldt CFA board admits that there are "complexities elided by such a comparison."

We are struck, however, by the understatement—your suggestion that the rhetoric in the *Headlines* article may have been "a bit overzealous"; and the Board's comment that there are "complexities" in comparing Humboldt County, and by implication Humboldt State University, to Murder Mountain. This is awfully timid criticism of a very inflammatory article. We realize that *Headlines* is not a scholarly journal but this article, presumably written by college teachers, resembles articles one finds in supermarket tabloids.

We are also disturbed by the suggestion in the article that only at Humboldt State University do students of color encounter difficulties; and by the call to discourage students from coming to Humboldt State. Here is more of what the article reports Professor Thomas as saying to the Trustees:

"Given the CSU's redirecting of students due to impaction, the CSU administration must adequately inform parents and students about the risk associated with living in Humboldt County, which is also known as "Murder Mountain."

"We who stand before you also believe the CSU needs to make a genuine commitment to student safety, in particular the safety of students of color, when you redirect them from their homes to unfamiliar places like Humboldt State," Thomas said.

Nearly all of the HSU-ERFA members belonged to CFA and many held leadership positions in the local chapters and in the statewide organization. Never to my knowledge in the history of the

organization has CFA used its extensive resources to target a campus with such mistruths, painted it with such hateful derogatory terms, and encouraged students and by inference faculty and staff not to come to Humboldt State University.

We urge you to stop CFA from using Humboldt State University as the scapegoat for the real problem that you stated in your letter to Renee Byrd: “Racism faced by students and the threat of violence against people of color is everywhere.” We suggest that you consider apologizing for CFA’s blanket condemnation of all Arcata residents and of the HSU academic community in the next CFA *Headlines* and at the upcoming Assembly.

CFA might wish also to consider posting an article in *Headlines* about some of the things that HSU and the Arcata community are doing to make students of color feel welcome. The Campus & Community Dialogue on Race (CDOR) is an annual event at HSU. At this event students, staff, faculty, administrators, and community members are invited, its website explains, “to present and attend programs that relate to racial justice and its intersections with all forms of oppression and resistance. Our objective is to create spaces and structures for reflection, analysis, dialogue and positive strategies for change.” This academic year this five-day event ran from October 29 – November 2, 2018.

A group, called Equity Arcata, has been formed. It is a partnership between the City of Arcata, HSU, and local business owners and community members. Its goal is to make HSU students welcome in the community. Each year this group organizes four “Home Away from Home Potluck Dinners” at a community center adjacent to the HSU campus. Community members cook the food and sit with students. There is also a student job board, a “free stuff” table to help students who have trouble making ends meet, and a raffle of items donated by local businesses. “The goal,” two organizers of recent potlucks say, “is not just to feed the students and nourish their bodies but to also feed their spirits with a warm welcome to this community that we love.”¹ I attended the potluck held last week. Students seemed to be having a good time eating some home cooked food, listening to music by the Nu Heavenly Tone Singers, trying their luck at the raffle.

Sincerely,
John Schafer, Chair of the HSU-ERFA Coordinating Council

CC: ERFA Coordinating Council
Stephanie Burkhalter, General Faculty President/University Senate Chair Associate
Professor Renée Byrd, HSU-CFA President
Lisa Rossbacher, HSU President

¹ See Anne Hartline and Wesley Chesbro, “Welcoming HSU Students to Our Home,” *Times Standard*, September 26, 2018.