

Dear University of California, Merced & UC Representatives,

We, the students of the University of California, Merced, are deeply concerned by the sudden termination of several directors who have been vital to our success and well-being on campus. Their removal not only affects individual scholars but threatens the broader support systems that have been essential to building equity, inclusion, and student achievement at our university.

On the day of UC Merced's 20 Year Anniversary Celebration, the university celebrated a \$5 million gift from the Campos Foundations, investing in an art track and field facility, with a drone show featuring high technology, with the backdrop of the fast-paced upbringing of our very new medical building. On this same day, the University of California, Merced terminated a total of three employees, yet continues to hire for other positions, meanwhile increasing pay for those who are potentially in line to take on the responsibilities of the departments that no longer have directors. The university eliminated important facets to student life and overall success here at the University of California, Merced.

Calvin E. Bright (1920-2020), a first-generation, generous man spent blood, sweat, and tears uplifting those around him, especially serving children and the youth. Beginning in 1957, Bright Foods, a food distribution company, designed and built approximately 2,300 single-family homes in 1971. Mr. Bright did not build those single-family homes overnight and did not halt his efforts there. He invested and began building a foundation for the passion, work ethic, compassion, and hope for those who come after him. All six of these traits were exhibited by Chad Williams, Dr. Danielle Burmuduez & Camerina A. Morales as they continuously poured into scholars here at UC Merced.

The Calvin E Bright Success Center was established at the University of California, Merced in 2011 with an endowment of \$2 million, just to establish the center that has touched many lives, providing learning support and advising to students throughout their academic careers at UC Merced. Carol Bright Tougas, daughter of Calvin E. Bright, who supports student empowerment and potential, is stated sincerely, "My father has always been passionate about helping those willing to help themselves, and we appreciate UC Merced's focus on empowering its students to reach their full potential." Dr. Tonantzin Osegura, alongside her colleagues, exhibit the exact opposite as it relates to empowering students and their full potential by silencing their voices when it comes to decisions in student affairs that directly impact our lives.

On September 5th, 2025, Chad Williams, Assistant Dean of Students & Director of the Calvin E. Bright Success Center, Camerina A. Morales, Director of Social Justice Initiatives and Identity Programs, and Danielle Burmuduez, Associate Director of Educational, Equity, & Access proceeded into work like any other day only to be notified that they were no longer an asset to University of California, Merced with later reasoning expressing UC-wide budget cuts stemming from the Trump Administration. Although the budget cuts are UC-wide, the operation and protocols proceeded in an unethical, unfair, and inhumane way of termination. Due to the sudden termination of these directors, it is anticipated that there will be a continued increase in pay for those who are expected to oversee these programs and services that were once overseen by Chad Williams, Camerina A. Morales, and Daniele Bermudez. Additionally, the criteria that was supposedly created to decide who to terminate was that they had less than five years of service or had been in their position for less than five years. Dr. Tonantzin Osegura, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, fits her very own requirements for termination: less than five years of service and non-represented position, whose salary can more than likely cover reinstating all three individuals, if not more.

Dr. Danielle Bermudez, University of California Alumna, has completed both her M.A. as well as her Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Humanities here at the University of California, Merced. She has worked tirelessly to support students as the Fiat Lux coordinator and was recently appointed as the Associate Director for Educational Equity and Access. The university used to highlight her accomplishments when her research was bringing them money in the form of fellowships and years later, you reward her by letting her go.

Chad Williams, in fact, recently created Career Opportunities & Research Exploration, a program aimed at increasing the number of marginalized identities within the fields of both student and academic affairs, providing developmental training and experimental learning opportunities. He had also created structure for programs under the Bright Success Center, which includes three distinct pillars: Transitions and Learning Support, Educational, Equity, & Access, and Belonging and Resilience. These three pillars were distinct in their support services and their cohesion under the mission of the Bright Success Center allowed programs and services to become more accessible for scholars to achieve their full potential. The university-wide graduation rate for UC Merced campuswide sits at about 72%. Throughout Chad's leadership as the director, he was able to raise the graduate rates of students involved in the Bright Success Center's various programs to 83%. Beforehand, throughout the hiring process, Chad Williams already felt a strong feeling that he wasn't welcome and would not be the pick of former Vice Chancellor Charles Nies. Members of the student body, alongside faculty and staff, came together, advocating for Chad Williams to be welcomed into the Bobcat community. In just his interview process, he had already made an impact that pushed the Bobcat community to advocate for his appointment as assistant dean and director.

Camerina A. Morales, also a University of California Alumna, completed her B.A. in Sociology at the University of California, Merced. She later pursued her M.A. in the Higher Education, Administration, and Leadership at Fresno State. She soon began working at the University of California, Santa Cruz as a College Programs Coordinator before starting at the University of California, Merced as the Director of the Office of Social Justice Initiatives and Identity Programs, where she worked diligently to provide students with a sense of belonging. She played a huge role in supporting and facilitating the Pan-Afrikan Council, taking on funding allocated by the Vice Chancellor in 2024, creating the Social Justice Initiatives Sponsorship Form meant for student-led events and programs that align with Social Justice Initiatives and Identity Programs' mission, vision, and pillars. During her interview process, Camerina expressed her excitement to return to the Bobcat community and in her short time as director, had created a space in which students felt welcomed, safe, and supported.

These three student affairs leaders have guided, influenced, and supported scholars in ways that other campus departments and individuals have not. Ahead, the Calvin E. Bright Success Center programs will be restructured to be housed under other campus departments that have absolutely no correlation. For instance, the Office of Student Involvement oversees campus life and activities such as fraternities/sortories, clubs/organizations, and campus celebrations, which encourages social growth. It will now inherit critical programs such as Services for Undocumented Students, as well as the entirety of the Office of Social Justice Initiatives and Identity Programs, which includes all affinity spaces on campus. Additionally, the Community Engagement Center, which focuses on building capacity for civic engagement and creating relationships between UC Merced and the larger community, will inherit programs such as Guardian Scholars and Bobcat Underground Scholars, which serve former foster youth, students facing housing insecurity, and system impacted students. On the other hand, the Calvin E. Bright Success Center is the place where students shine bright, providing academic advising, learning support, transition programs for academic and personal success, aiming to support students who come from underrepresented backgrounds. These student populations are the most vulnerable and the most at risk when it comes to completing their university journeys. They require intentional care and support from individuals who are subject matter experts on their needs and deserve to be considered when the programs that are meant to be for them face drastic changes.

We, the student body, would like to confront these sudden changes that have tremendously affected the student body at the University of California, Merced. As expressed in a pro-staff Zoom meeting that took place September 5th, 2025, the terminations were the best route to protecting what we have, but the student body was not consulted in terms of decisions and as such, we feel there is absolutely no concern about the effects the decision will have on the student body. We find it severely suspicious, unethical, and extremely alarming that in terms of hiring and onboarding professional staff, the student body is considered, yet in terms of terminating roles, the student body is not. We, standing strong, are here to express the voice of the student body here at the University of California, Merced, to advocate for the three influential members of the University of California, Merced campus.

We, the student body, demand that the Calvin E. Bright Success Center programs and services are not dispersed throughout different campus departments to fulfill budgetary needs and that all three individuals that have been previously been off be reinstated into their positions as soon as possible. Finally, the student body demands a voice during decisions being made in the face of budget cuts, as every decision directly affects scholars who have located a sense of home here at UC Merced.

Alongside those demands, we demand that the 60-day no campus visitation that has been enforced upon the three individuals who were terminated be reversed, allowing these members to visit the students who have been heavily impacted by them. We would also like campus leadership to address the hostile actions taken after the termination, treating these individuals as if they were criminals, revoking campus access and necessities, and walking them out of the office to the parking lot to ensure they depart, which all took place in front of the student body, but even heavier, in front of the student leaders whose lives had been so positively impacted by them.

Scholar Voices:

Brenden D. Wilson Public Health Major, 2027; President, Black Student Union; Event Planning Lead, Black Student Coalition; JP Morgan Chase Social Justice Learning Initiatives Fellow

As an African American first-generation male in higher education, I've struggled to discover my sense of home here at UC Merced. In 2023, throughout my beginning years of higher education, my success mentor provided directly from SJLI expressed that I should visit the Calvin E. Bright Success Center as they may have plenty of programs and resources for one like myself. I began sitting in the Bright Success Center office weekly on gaps between courses just to become familiar, and in October 2023, I had the opportunity to meet the Director of the Calvin E. Bright Success Center himself Chad Williams. Chad Williams educated me on the programs and services his office provided, which stood out to me as I identified with several of the populations that these programs directly served. Since then I have had the opportunity to express who I am, grow into the person I am now, and envision myself continuing to strive for greatness. As a proud scholar of University of California, Merced, to hear that you all terminated influential people of color and alumni that represent the campus community is something that cannot be forgiven. You all took away important resources that allow for students to thrive and not just solely survive at the university.

Goodness Emedom, Human Biology Major, 2025, Co-President Black Student Union; President Phi Alpha Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, INC.; Founder of the Nigerian Student Association at the University of California, Merced; Former Black Scholars' Resource Center and Main Office Scholar Coordinator, and Website Design Lead Scholar Coordinator at the Office of Social Justice Initiatives and Identity Programs; Current Affinity Group Coordinator for New Student Orientation within the Bright Success Center

During my time at the University of California, Merced, I have been blessed to know Chad Williams and Camerina Morales during the three years they have been employed here. I was blessed to have been introduced to them during my second year, and it breaks my heart to have seen them go so abruptly with no chance to say goodbye. The opportunities that these individuals have opened for me was beyond my belief, as I didn't think it was possible, nor did I ever see myself in those positions. These people made it possible for me to be able to not just survive, but thrive at UC Merced. As I complete my last semester at the University, it is disheartening to see the staff that meant the most to me be let go in such a manner that left students, faculty and staff distraught. As we grieve the losses of these exceptional leaders, we should also prepare for the school to feel the biggest dent in its administration, as they removed 3 staff members who cared the most for the students at the University of California, Merced. I pride myself in being one of the first students to meet both of these incredible people, however, it hurts to make the connection that I was also one of the first students to hear of their dismissal. My heart aches the most knowing that I'll never be able to walk into SJI and see Camerina's smile, or walk into the BSC and hear Chad playing Erykah Badu in his office. Although I did not know Danielle as well, I knew Chad and Camerina. They were exemplary examples of what UC Merced should stand for, and their removal will have consequences.

During their time here, there is one thing I regret not doing enough of - saying thank you. Thank you to Chad Williams for constantly keeping me accountable, for believing in me even when it felt like nobody else did, for genuinely asking if I was okay because you could see through the mask I put on when I was hurting. Thank you for all the programs and resources that you put in place so that people who look like me can have a chance to succeed while they are at UC Merced. Thank you to Camerina Morales, for being the first supervisor I've ever had to show me the true meaning of kindness. Thank you for your smiles, loud laughs and good vibes. Thank you for creating a safe space for those who came to you and for educating others while still being open to learning yourself pertaining to matters concerning cultural diversity, equity and inclusion. Thank you both for being the people that you are and for choosing me as one of the many people you have influenced during your time at the University. You will be missed and please remember that you will always have the biggest place in my heart for the work you have done. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Letha Jarman, Psychology Major, 2026; President of Black Student Coalition (BSC), Student Administrative Assistant of the Bright Success Center, Merced County Behavioral Health Recovery Services Intern

In the release of Camerina Morales, Chad Williams and Danielle Bermudez from the University of California, Merced, I've been devastated for not only myself, but for my peers and community here on campus. While these three staff members were vital in my personal, professional and academic development, these individuals represented and stood for much more on this campus. To lose two directors and an associate director of two departments established to bridge the gaps for students who have been historically and institutionally disadvantaged has felt like a step back from the very values this institution claims to uphold and stand for.

In addition to the release of these staff members, we have lost our Afropolitan Graduation and are soon to lose our AFRO Hall, both being foundational aspects of Black students' experience at UC Merced. These decisions were made without the consultation of the greater UC Merced campus, let alone the affected communities. Students who identify similarly to me are promised support and guidance time and again, and when finally granted, it's taken away with no warning and explanation to show for it. I have been promised by the UC Merced administration themselves that efforts would be made, and changes would be seen, and that the marginalized communities on campus would receive the visibility and support required for their success. With these sudden changes, my only question is if you are not serving the students, then who exactly are you serving?

