

University of California, Davis pays \$175,000 to erase pepper spraying incident from Internet

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In the aftermath of the November 2011 pepper spraying of University of California (UC), Davis, students and alumni participating in Occupy Wall Street protests, campus administration paid consultants upwards of \$175,000 to remove references to the incident from the Internet.

The vicious use of military-grade pepper spray came to epitomize the state's willingness to ruthlessly suppress any opposition to social inequality. Eleven protesters received medical treatment and two were hospitalized, one of whom coughed up blood for hours. Police had already violently suppressed the Occupy UC Berkeley and Occupy Oakland encampments, while the FBI was preparing a nationwide crackdown on all Occupy encampments.

Videos of the brutal pepper spraying were viewed millions of times, with the incident making headlines and generating outrage worldwide. The image of campus police Lt. John Pike methodically spraying the seated students in their faces became the basis for dozens of memes parodying police brutality.

Administration officials led by Chancellor Linda Katehi ordered police to remove tents set up by protesters, making her fully responsible for the subsequent crackdown. Katehi, already hated by students for her role in the police suppression of 2009 protests against tuition hikes, came under intense scrutiny and was subjected to a silent "walk of shame" by hundreds of students the following night. An online petition calling for her resignation garnered more than 100,000 signatures.

Fallout from the incident continued throughout 2012, culminating in a September 2012 settlement of a federal class-action lawsuit against the UC Regents on behalf of 21 students who were pepper sprayed. The students each received roughly \$35,000 from the university.

Prior to the UC Regents' settlement with the students, Lt. John Pike was fired in July 2012 after being on paid administrative leave for eight months. In 2013, he received \$38,055 in workers' compensation, a clear message of approval of Pike's brutal actions.

Documents released by the *Sacramento Bee* last week indicate that the UC Davis administration moved to hire consultants from Nevins & Associates shortly after the legal settlement with the students, signing a six-month, \$15,000 a month contract in January 2013.

The overarching goal of this contract was to improve the results obtained by those searching on Google or other search engines for information about the university or Katehi. One of the objectives listed in a six-page proposal from Nevins included the "eradication of references to the pepper spray incident in search results on Google for the university and the Chancellor."

As part of the agreement, Nevins & Associates pledged to counteract the "venomous rhetoric about UC Davis and the chancellor" through "strategic placement of online content," including modifications to "existing and future content" and the creation of original content as needed.

In June 2014, UC Davis contracted with the PR firm IDMLOCO for \$82,500 to design a "comprehensive search engine results management strategy." IDMLOCO promised to create a "reasonable balance of positive natural search results."

Apparently after achieving some success, the company was awarded two more contracts last year—one in February 2015 for up to \$96,000 and another in September for up to \$67,500. As part of these deals, the company agreed to create an "integrated social media program for executive communications."

The firm also stated that its "primary goal" was to "achieve a reasonable balance of positive natural search

results on common terms concerning UC Davis and Chancellor Katehi.”

Financing for these lucrative contracts came from UC Davis’ strategic communications department, whose budget increased under Katehi from \$2.93 million in 2009 to \$5.47 million in 2015.

These damning revelations underscore the reactionary character of the UC Davis administration under the widely hated Katehi. In recent weeks, Katehi herself has come under intense scrutiny following separate revelations that she accepted a board seat on DeVry Education Group, a for-profit higher education company currently under investigation by the Federal Trade Commission, and that she has already earned \$420,000 serving on the board of John Wiley & Sons, a leading publisher of science and math textbooks for universities.

Regarding the Wiley & Sons revelation, Ed Howard, senior counsel for the Center for Public Interest Law, told the *Sacramento Bee* that Katehi was “being paid a huge sum of money by a private, for-profit corporation that has business with the University of California. ... It’s pretty much the dictionary definition of a conflict of interest.”

In response to these initial revelations, students began a five-week occupation of the 5th floor of the administrative building Mrak Hall, directly outside Katehi’s office. On April 1, hundreds of students and faculty marched through campus, calling for the resignation of Katehi. The roughly two dozen students occupying Mrak Hall left the building last Friday, feeling that their protest was isolated.

In a statement issued upon the ending of their occupation, the students wrote, “The problem is not only with Linda Katehi and does not only reside at UC Davis. We are calling on students, workers, and faculty across the UC campuses and across the broader United States to speak out against their administrators and institutions that are placing pride and profit over students and workers.”

Among the various corrupt chancellors and heads of American universities facing student demands for their resignation, Katehi is arguably the most deserving. In her ruthless careerism and pro-business policies, she personifies the transformation of public higher education in the US along corporate lines.

Katehi and UC President Janet Napolitano, among others, also represent the merging of the military-intelligence apparatus with higher education. Katehi serves on a special FBI task force called the National Security Higher Education Advisory Board, whose purpose is to monitor radical students on many of

America’s leading universities and “promote discussion and outreach between research universities and the FBI.”

After overseeing the deportation of hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers and the deaths of thousands of others who have perished struggling to enter the US, Napolitano brought her spying skills acquired as chief of Homeland Security to the UC system when she was hired as president in 2013. She was recently exposed for implementing a secret spyware system designed to monitor and collect data from all individuals within the networks affiliated with the UC. She has come to Katehi’s defense during the recent protests.

In her native Greece, Katehi played a major role in 2011 in bringing police back onto Greek university campuses after a nearly 30-year ban on such activity. She co-signed an influential report that led to the overturning of the Academic Asylum Law, initially passed in 1982 following the 1973 police massacre of 24 student protesters at Athens Polytechnic. The law required police to request permission from a prosecutor before entering a campus.

Katehi’s personal corruption is by no means exceptional. Her \$424,360 annual salary is the standard fare for chancellors at the UC’s most competitive campuses and at many universities nationwide. Napolitano has a base salary of \$570,000. UC San Francisco Chancellor Susan Desmond-Hellmann received \$220,000 in cash and additional stock options for 180 hours of work on the board of Procter & Gamble in 2012 and 2013, while many other chancellors moonlight on corporate boards nationwide.

The UC Davis International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) unequivocally condemns the corrupt actions of the UC Davis administration and in particular Chancellor Katehi, and supports the calls for her resignation. To fundamentally address the crisis of public education, however, requires a complete break with the Democratic Party and a struggle to unite students and workers against all forms of austerity. Only through such a broader struggle can the basic social right to free, high-quality public education be secured.



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