

This statement is from the Cotter Family – the mother and siblings of Kathleen Meixner, widow of Thomas Meixner. (Jocelyn Cotter, Lisa Kirsch, Kevin Cotter, Amy Monreal and Colin Cotter)

We are deeply appreciative of the U of A Faculty Senate committee's safety report and are disgusted by the U of A administration's response.

Our brother-in-law and son-in-law Tom Meixner was murdered in his campus building after teaching a class last October 5th. Shortly after Tom's murder, the University of Arizona Faculty Senate, under the leadership of Dr. Leila Hudson, commissioned an investigation of campus safety. This meant a lot to our family because the committee members, led by Dr. Jenny Lee, care deeply for the university and its students, staff, and faculty, just like Tom did in his professional life. They want to make sure that colleges and departments can move forward knowing that their leadership has an active plan to create a safe environment on campus. We know Tom would stand and work with them.

The interim report by the General Faculty Committee on University Safety for All exceeded our expectations in terms of its scope, depth, and meaningful conclusions. The committee members volunteered 1000+ hours of their time, engaging in interviews of diverse groups, and researching the circumstances of Tom's murder and three other safety-related incidents on campus. The conclusions of the report affirm our experiences both before and after Tom's murder about problems that the University of Arizona needs to address moving forward. The fact that the report was unanimously approved by the UA Faculty Senate speaks volumes about the importance of the committee's work. They have demonstrated courageous leadership.

We were extremely disappointed and angry with the U of A's response to the Safety for All report. There was no acknowledgment of the importance of the committee's work. Particularly upsetting, the administration made a specific statement that the interim report "represents the work of a subset of faculty that has reached sweeping conclusions based in large part on misleading characterizations and the selective use of facts and quotations" and, "We encourage everyone to await the comprehensive PAX Group report, which will contain the assessment of experts based on countless hours of interviews and a thorough review of all relevant information and documentation." Rather than acknowledging the thorough work of the committee and reserving judgment until the PAX group shares its findings, the university communicates a posture that is dismissive of dedicated faculty members who want to protect their UA family. There is inherent value in having both an internal and external investigation of how threats are handled at the U of A. We don't understand why the U of A would try to delegitimize the report. We can only imagine how this response has affected faculty, staff, and students. Personally, it has increased our anxiety about whether there will ever be any accountability and ownership by the U of A regarding the mistakes that were made leading up to Tom's murder.

We were grateful to have the opportunity to virtually attend the Faculty Senate meeting last week to learn how the members responded to the Safety for All report and to witness the unanimous vote for its approval. We were also grateful that a Senate member asked President Robbins about accountability, and he responded, "I am the sole person you can hold

accountable for this. I take responsibility for it, you can hold me accountable. Even though I did not know these threats were going on for a long time. . . . And so, whether it's a lack of commission or omission – I am the one that's accountable for this. So if anyone is looking for someone to hold accountable, it'd be me. Mistakes that were made in terms of communication, I believe, I think as we go through and give time for due process and the full report, I think that we can have those discussions at the end.” Our family does not accept Robbins’ taking sole responsibility, given that he did not know about the threats ahead of time. What does accountability mean in this situation at the highest level of the University of Arizona administration? Legitimate accountability needs to occur in all of the specific areas of incompetence and weakness in the system.

It is our hope that the Safety for All report and the PAX report in tandem will provide a roadmap for safety improvements at the University moving forward, but that cannot happen unless the U of A reckons with the road that led to Tom’s murder, which was reported in depth by the General Faculty Committee on University Safety for All. The University of Arizona needs courageous leadership at this moment. We implore President Robbins and the UA administration to support the Faculty Senate in its work to ensure the safety and well-being of the Wildcat community. It would be the most meaningful way to honor Tom’s legacy.

Added February 14th: On February 13th, the UA responded to this family statement that safety on campus is a top priority for President Robbins. It is our greatest hope that not just President Robbins, but the entire UA administration, is committed to making real safety improvements. However, words from all UA representatives matter to build trust with the campus community to move forward from this tragedy. And actions matter even more.