A few days ago, a disturbing incident happened at the University of the Philippines Diliman. A group of protesters, consisting of some UP students, confronted Department of Budget and Management Secretary Florencio B. Abad outside the UP School of Economics auditorium. He was then leaving a forum, where he was one of the speakers. According to media reports, Secretary Abad was subjected to verbal indignities and the protesters hurled “placards, crumpled papers and coins” at him.

The forum was organized by the UP Diliman University Student Council and the UP School of Economics Student Council to discuss the proposed UP budget. Reportedly, the forum also discussed the disbursement acceleration program of the government.

Secretary Abad, as an invited speaker in this UP student forum, should have been accorded the courtesy and respect due to all guests of the University. While UP constituents are free to actively express their views on issues that affect our nation, such as the proper use of public funds, UP does not condone the use of violence in any manner against any person, be it a member of the university community, a visitor, or a government official.

UP Diliman is now investigating the reported incident in accordance with the University’s rules, including the participation of people who are not affiliated with UP.

I have always maintained that as the country’s national university, UP must lead the debate on important issues confronting the country. UP must also uphold the time-honored tradition of dissent vis-a-vis questionable government policies. But debate and dissent, while articulated with passion, require evidence-based and reasoned arguments, and civility to and respect for those who hold the opposite view. Abusive words and deeds have no place in the hallowed grounds of the University.

Alfredo E. Pascual
President