

Thursday, February 13, 2020

Dear Arts & Sciences Family,

By now you have likely heard that on Tuesday, January 28, a UofL student left two pamphlets in a classroom prior to a class on LGBTQ+ identity. One of the pamphlets was on the gospels and the second was titled “God and Sexuality.” In addition, the student waited outside of the classroom until class was over in attempt to engage with the students. When I first learned about this, we did not know whether this individual was a student or not, so I asked for a university police officer to be present for the next class meeting, as did the instructor’s chair.

The student showed up again at the next class meeting. At that time, the assigned police officer identified the student and instructed them to visit the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office interviewed the student, and met with the department chairs. It was determined that given that they didn’t enter the classroom while class was underway that they were acting within their free speech rights. Unfortunately, this information was not conveyed in a way that reassured the instructor or her students. They felt neither safe nor valued.

On Thursday, February 6, President Bendapudi, Provost Boehm, and I met with the class. The students in the class and their allies shared the fear they felt, and they shared their frustration at UofL’s initial response. I was distressed to hear the hurt and fear the students were experiencing, and I spoke with the instructor about how we can support her, her students, and their allies and begin to address their concerns. Additionally, at that time and since, I have heard many questions about the scope and limits of free speech, and the application of the Student Code of Conduct in this situation. To address some of these questions, I compiled an [FAQ](#).

I am very proud—and we all should be—of the care and support many in the UofL and Louisville communities have shown for the students and faculty who have been impacted by this. I also am proud of the critical analyses and passionate advocacy we have seen, which I am confident will continue and will lead to many fruitful discussions and actions in the future. All of this has made evident once again the value of a liberal arts education. It is the very knowledge and skills that we teach in A&S that prepared our community to engage so thoughtfully, strategically, and passionately with the issues surrounding this situation. Even though we can and will do better, I believe we are a community of care. We are compassionate, humanistic, and socially-informed critical thinkers.

Conversations are continuing, but a preliminary list of next steps includes the following:

1. We will come together as a community and support those that have felt threatened by these anti-LGBTQ+ messages. A town hall for the A&S community is being planned.
2. We will provide increased security to the class that has been impacted. A university police officer will be outside the class until the end of the term.
3. We will provide priority counseling services to our impacted students; the Provost and Dean of Students have already made arrangements to step this up to meet the need.
4. The Provost is forming a committee to review the Student Code of Conduct, and UofL's free speech policies and to make recommendations for possible revisions.

In summary, we will continue to infuse the [CARDINAL Principles](#) into all that we do. We will hit bumps and snags along the way, but we will use this set of principles as our guiding star as we navigate through the tough spots. Without fail, we will continue to grow and strengthen as a community.

Please [let me know](#) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



David S. Owen, Ph.D.  
Interim Dean  
Professor of Philosophy  
[asdean@louisville.edu](mailto:asdean@louisville.edu)  
[louisville.edu/artsandsciences](http://louisville.edu/artsandsciences)

Pronouns: he, him, his