

**Subject:** from Kimberly Barrett to the Lawrence community

**Date:** Saturday, May 20, 2017 at 8:32:05 PM Central Daylight Time

**From:** Communications

**To:** STUDENT-L, FACULTY-L, STAFF-L

To the Lawrence community,

I am writing this in response to the many messages of concern we have received from students and alumni related to the group seeking official recognition by LUCC known as the Free Thought Society. As I am sure you are aware, in recent years we have witnessed a broadening ideological divide in the country, a division that was its widest following the recent presidential election. This situation is intensified by an inability to talk to one another across differences in ways that are authentic and respect the humanity of all involved in the dialogue. With Lawrence's commitment to promoting critical and compassionate thinking that includes respect for the perspectives of others, we are prepared to help students develop the cultural competence and humility to bridge these divides.

However, this skill-building process is a messy, iterative process. It is difficult and will at times end with encounters in which no one feels satisfied. But, even as we work to ensure that everyone is free from discrimination and harassment we must engage in these difficult dialogues in order to become the truly inclusive Lawrence we all hope to create and to influence the broader society in positive ways.

The concerns that have been expressed arose in reaction to an event held by the aforementioned group last week. I attended that event at which a film, *Can We Take A Joke*, was screened. In addition to heartfelt objections to the premise of the film, I believe the need to build these communications skills is at the root of the difficulties that occurred. Since that night, many statements have been made and letters written that underscore the understandable anger related to the content of the film. However, I didn't personally witness any of our students engaged in hate speech.

We received several bias incident reports including some related to an interaction between two students which resulted in one student being asked to leave the event by a member of the sponsoring group. Each of these reports will be reviewed and acted upon. I am also certain that LUCC will take all of the feedback they have received into consideration as they deliberate as to whether or not to recognize this group.

Finally, as we approach the end of the term, I hope everyone will take care of themselves and finish the year strong academically. And, other than those looking forward to commencement, I hope all will return to campus in the fall and rededicate themselves to creating a more inclusive, equity-minded campus community.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Barrett, Ph.D.  
Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion  
and Associate Dean of the Faculty

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