

Dear Lawrence Community,

The last few days have been painful ones for many members of our community, as they have also been for me. [An event sponsored by a group of students calling themselves Students for Free Thought on Wednesday night led to confrontations that illustrated the distance we have yet to go as a community when it comes to discussing conflicting points of view.](#) I understand from many who attended that although there were valiant efforts to engage in civil dialogue, some used the forum to make statements that were hurtful and built on ugly stereotypes. The event and its aftermath have left many students wondering whether the University cares about their safety and our ability and desire to foster constructive discussions of serious issues.

The Lawrence University Community Council (LUCC) upheld the decision of its Steering Committee not to grant recognition to the sponsoring student group. I want to thank the LUCC leadership for their careful analysis of the issues surrounding the group's application for formal recognition. They have met with the group on a number of occasions to determine compliance with LUCC bylaws, and have issued a statement on their decision, which was sent to students last night.

[Additionally, on Thursday morning we also discovered another round of posters on campus that tried to undermine our efforts to become a more inclusive community.](#) These posters, like the ones we discovered in the winter, were placed in public locations around campus. Campus Safety is continuing its investigation and requests that anyone with information please contact them directly.

Exchanges on social media have also been heated and at times concerning. Some have devolved into personal attacks and vitriol. In a few situations serious threats have been reported. We are working closely with the Appleton Police Department to investigate all instances where physical safety is threatened. If there is anyone who has an immediate safety concern, please contact Campus Safety at x6999.

We need to continue to find ways to ensure all of us feel safe on campus. At a time when many feel under attack in the communities we belong to off campus, we have to find additional ways to reinforce a sense of safety here at home. The senior leaders of the university, including incoming provost and dean of the faculty, Katie Kodat, and incoming vice president for student life, Chris Card, join Kimberly Barrett and me in our commitment to reinforce our efforts in this area. I know we can and must do better.

At the core of our educational mission is the free exchange of ideas, viewpoints, and information; we are committed to productive discussion of issues that are crucially important to every one of us, and to our community as a whole. Moreover, while we recognize and support the value of expressing, discussing, and debating ideas, we do not believe that all ideas have equal value. We hold equity and the creation of a just society as core principles, and will continue to affirm these in all that we do. We need to develop skills and a better framework to make this exchange possible without threatening community members. The Administration will work with LUCC and others to develop a framework that will help better foster this exchange. We will have proposals ready for discussion this fall.

I wish you all a successful end to the spring term.

Yours,

Mark

Mark Burstein
President, Lawrence University

Sampson House, [711 E. Boldt Way | Appleton, WI 54911-5699](#) | Office 920.832.6525