



June 26, 2019

Mr. Adam Steinbaugh
Director, Individual Rights Defense Program
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
510 Walnut Street, Suite 1250
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Mr. Steinbaugh:

This is in response to your June 21, 2019, letter regarding the decision that I made to remove a quote on a sign in front of our library. The sign was not disseminating information about the library's programs and services, and the sign is not in a designated public forum, even though it was located outside in a public area. The sign is for university business and is not available for public use. The library, which includes both faculty and staff employees, previously had internal procedures that ensured that the sign was related to library programs and services and consistent with academic freedom. At some point, individuals in the library ceased following the internal procedures regarding the sign.

I firmly believe in academic freedom and free speech. The university, in fact, has content neutral sign and distribution of literature policies that allow student organizations and departments to post outdoor stake signs on university property and display materials on campus. However, the university also has an obligation to ensure that university equipment and resources are used in support of university-related purposes and not for personal matters.

We are continuing to discuss this issue on our campus at various public forums, faculty meetings, staff meetings, and student events. I will take your comments and information into consideration as we continue the conversation on our campus. I am attaching two campus statements in which I have discussed the sign in more detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "H. D. Davis".

Houston D. Davis, Ph.D.
President

Torreyson Library sign

1 message

UCA President's Office <presidentsoffice@uca.edu>

Tue, Jun 18, 2019 at 10:18 AM

Reply-To: noreply@uca.edu

To: FS <fs@uca.edu>, student@cub.uca.edu

Faculty, Staff and Students:

There have been many questions regarding a quote that was removed last week from the external Torreyson Library sign. As I have been approached directly about this in the last couple of days, I have shared the following information and want you all to have this directly from me.

The issues surrounding the sign's use last week and removal were complicated. It is a core university value that we support our entire community and its diversity. Advocating for our LGBTQ community is not only appropriate but very important. I believe that the intent of the message was to show support for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff, but it was not okay for the university sign to be used to make a personal statement or advocate for a personal viewpoint. That is the line that the sign itself crossed. Unlike our student groups or other organizations, the library is an official arm of UCA and when it "speaks" on that sign which serves information regarding library hours, it speaks officially. We do have to be very careful that we walk the fine line between individual freedom of speech and institutional voice. This was one of those complicated situations.

I join every other individual on this campus with personal beliefs, values, politics, and causes, but the university messaging and platform cannot be used to advance personal agendas. On an individual level, freedom of speech to advocate for one's position is incredibly important. I frequently get criticism from individuals and groups on campus about issues and ideas raised within the campus, but I remind those same people that my defense of their rights to causes and issues must be matched by a similar defense of that which offends them. But, it is not within university policy to use the university platform to advocate for a personal viewpoint.

Timing of the sign in the summer also was considered. We have to be very mindful of the hundreds of minors that are on campus during the summer which further complicates an environment that is normally programmed for adults and our very meaningful conversations about ourselves and our world. One outgrowth of that perspective on minors has been a start of a good conversation about best practices how to present or represent issues when minors are on the campus.

I am visiting with the team in the library to hear their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions. I believe that everyone involved came from a position of love and support. A genuine gesture by our library faculty and staff for members of our community has morphed into a misunderstanding about our core values and matters of freedom of speech versus institutional voice.

Let me be clear. I and the university support all of our students and the diversity of our entire community. Thank you for your time and attention.

Houston Davis

Torreyson Library sign update

1 message

UCA President's Office <presidentsoffice@uca.edu>

Wed, Jun 19, 2019 at 2:49 PM

Reply-To: noreply@uca.edu

To: FS <fs@uca.edu>, student@cub.uca.edu

Faculty, Staff, and Students:

I wanted to provide an update to all of you of what has occurred, and what I have learned, since my email to you yesterday regarding the Torreyson Library sign.

I understand that the removal of this quote has caused fury and sadness across campus. My observation that the library sign is a university platform and should be reviewed as such has morphed into a debate about UCA's values and commitment to diversity. I am very sorry that this has been the outcome and that anyone has felt unwelcome or silenced. That was certainly never my intention. We are absolutely committed to supporting our LGBTQ students and our entire campus community.

I have appreciated the emails and phone calls regarding the matter -- as well as conversations within and between meetings on the subject. I met with the library faculty and staff yesterday with regard to this issue. The sign has been a very important vehicle for the library to provide information and celebrate and support various groups and causes. I did learn that they have in the recent past had internal procedures that ensured that the sign was limited to library programs and services. We talked about short- and long-term strategies as well as best practices for making appropriate use of the sign. Also, today I will be meeting with PRISM leadership to hear their concerns. Our Student Services and Student Government Association leadership are also in discussions today regarding this subject. I am very appreciative of all of these groups and their willingness to share their candid thoughts and suggestions. I look forward to continued conversations.

Nothing about the communication yesterday was meant to imply that minors should not be exposed to the LGBTQ community. This is absolutely not how that was intended, but a great deal of feedback has made it clear that some interpretations led to that conclusion. We get numerous complaints in the summer about a host of issues because of the large number of minors on campus. Regardless of the subject matter, we do have to be mindful about all information and debate that typically is designed for students, faculty, and staff.

I also want to address the conclusion that some have come to that, because of this event, UCA does not value, support, and protect our LGBTQ community. That is simply not true. The university offers numerous services, programs, and events in support of this community each year. The Counseling Center collaborates on projects regularly with the PRISM Alliance; provides programming during October, which is LGBT History Month; participates in the Campus Pride Walk and the Little Rock and Conway Pride Parades; offers a safe space to discuss gender and sexual affinity; and provides programs to departments to increase understanding of our LGBTQ community. In addition, our office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion has an LGBTQ+ Affinity Group that has been in place since 2015. The office hosts an annual lavender graduation dinner; a UCA Pride Walk; a PRISM Drag Show Reception for queens and attendees; and it offers transportation to the Little Rock Pride Fest, among other things. You will find me at many of these events, supporting our students and their programs.

Related to the above, I also want to speak for our leadership team and the attention that we pay to defending the importance of every activity and event in the prior paragraph. It probably does not come as a surprise to many of you that we receive a limited amount of inside and a great deal of outside criticism regarding those programs. While I find myself defending them on a predictable annual cycle, I am proud to advocate for all of these programs and services and will always. While I know not to take the criticism personally, my professional record and the record of my leadership team does not merit some of the names that are being hurled nor the label of anti-LGBTQ. Those UCA faculty and staff close to day-to-day administrative operations are vigilant in defending and supporting our LGBTQ community. Not only do we defend, but we also form a large portion of the core group of faculty and staff attendees and participants at these events.

Thank you again for your time, attention, and thoughtfulness about these core values and our efforts to serve our students and community.