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A Community and Technical College

February 17, 2006

Robert L. Shibley
Program Manager
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
601 Walnut Street, Suite 510
Philadelphia PA 19106

Dear Mr. Shibley:

President Litecky has asked that I respond to your letter of February 16, 2006. Unfortunately, it appears that recent events at Century College have served as a convenient platform for those who seek to amplify particular messages, and that your organization has received misinformation about those events.

First, it should be understood that Century College is strongly committed to protecting all of the rights of members of its community, including their First Amendment rights. Your letter assumes certain facts that simply are incorrect. For example, your letter asserts that "Century administrators have justified the decision to censor the display of cartoons by saying that there were perceived as offensive." Apparently in support of that conclusion, you then quote an article in the Star Tribune, in turn quoting Vice President Mike Bruner saying that, "[w]hen students come to me who are hurt, it signals to me we're off course somewhere." Century College administrators did not censor the display of the controversial political cartoon, and Mr. Bruner's comments were regarding concerns about students, not justifying censorship.

Second, the College is limited in what it can respond to or verify regarding specific personnel matters, pursuant to provisions of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act; see Minnesota Statutes § 13.43.¹ I can tell you that I am aware of no pending complaints against Ms. Karen Murdock. Further, Vice President Mike Bruner is not aware of any meeting scheduled for Monday, February 20, or any other time between himself and Ms. Murdock. (Indeed, the college buildings will be closed on February 20 in view of the President's Day holiday.)

¹ Available at: -
http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/bin/getpub.php?pubtype=STAT_CHAP_SEC&year=curren§ion=13.43&image.x=15&image.y=11&image=Get+Section

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Finally, we appreciate your exhortations concerning colleges serving as marketplaces of ideas. In fact, you may be interested in the message sent out by President Litecky to the Century College community on February 10, 2006, a week before receiving your letter:

Issues involving free speech, freedom of the press, and religious tolerance and respect have been front page news around the world in recent weeks. This week, similar conversations have occurred here at Century College.

Century College strives to be a welcoming place for all individuals in the college community. The valued diversity of our community means that we may be confronted by ideas, statements, or publications with which we are not familiar or do not agree. Colleges and universities have long been recognized as the "marketplace of ideas" in our country. It is our hope that Century College can lead by example in having discourse about the many competing ideas and beliefs in a respectful, thoughtful, and tolerant manner and better equip us as members of both the local and global community.

Larry Litecky, President

While your letter may have been fueled at least in part by various media reports about incidents at Century College, it appears that your sources received inaccurate information, or perhaps misunderstood the information received. I hope this letter helps clarify the events at Century College.

Very truly yours,



John O'Brien
Vice-President of Academic Affairs
Century College