

Dear LSC Campus Community:

Inclusion.
Diversity.
Democracy.
Civility.
Mutual Respect.

These are not empty words. They have deep national meaning, and they definitely mean a great deal at Lake Superior College. These words and their meaning are woven into the fabric of our values, our policies, our practices, and our work. They are foundational to our planning and daily life. They are built in to Minnesota State's Equity 2030 goals, and they guide us on our path to becoming a safe and truly welcoming institution of learning for **all**: students, staff, and faculty.

And just as these words have inherent meaning, there are opposing interpretations on what constitutes inclusion, or on what diversity means in terms of ideologies or philosophies, political affiliations, or any other category humans have contrived such as race or gender or social class.

Democracy, as Americans have historically perceived it, includes the right for its citizens to disagree on and hold different views on what it means to express those views and beliefs. This freedom of expression often leads to disagreements and conflicts. And that is OK, provided we engage in these disagreements by practicing **civility** and **mutual respect** for the other person's point of view. It is not the role of Lake Superior College "... to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive" (see the [Chicago Statement here](#)). Learning to engage in these conversations with civility and mutual respect is part of the learning experience in higher education, the workplace, and in civil society. It is part of growing up at any age.

Last week, there was an incident that challenged our expectations of civil and respectful engagement. Some participants perceived the topic of conversation as a threat, some perceived the methods used to engage conversation as harassing, while others believed the tactics to be provocative only with the intent to spark debate.

Thankfully, in none of the versions of the incident did we find any violence or physical restraint: any and all of the participants could have simply walked away from the conversation. However, the incident did lack **civility** and **mutual respect** for the other person's point of view. But let's be clear: while we at LSC have a responsibility for maintaining a civil and mutually respectful campus climate, "...concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community" (see the [Chicago Statement here](#)). No one is forced to accept anyone's point of view, and at the same time, no one is allowed to make others' lives more difficult because of a deeply held belief or viewpoint. **It is everyone's responsibility to**

be kind to each other and respect differences, even if you do not accept those differences.

To be clear: last week's incident did include some disrespectful behaviors that crossed the line bordering on harassment with deliberate provocation.

The Lake Superior College (and Minnesota State) policy [1.B.1 Nondiscrimination in Employment and Educational Opportunity](#) states in part:

“This policy is directed at verbal or physical conduct that constitutes discrimination/harassment under state and federal law and is not directed at the content of speech. In cases in which verbal statements and other forms of expression are involved, LSC will give due consideration to an individual's constitutionally protected right to free speech and academic freedom.

However, discrimination and harassment are not within the protections of academic freedom or free speech.

LSC will encourage full freedom, within the law, of expression, inquiry, teaching and research. Academic freedom comes with a responsibility that all members of our education community benefit from it without intimidation, exploitation or coercion.”

The [Policy 3.6 Lake Superior College Code of Conduct](#) for students reads in part:

“As an institution dedicated to teaching and learning, Lake Superior College has a vested interest in maintaining an environment in which students are free to pursue their academic interests and responsibilities. Conduct that unreasonably restricts such freedom and interferes with the College mission of promoting student learning is subject to regulation and/or sanction by the College. The creation of such an environment is premised on the assumption that students have both rights and responsibilities. Therefore, a major function of the College is to guarantee student rights, yet to demand student responsibility.”

Responsibility in this sense is the civil and respectful engagement in discussing controversial topics, at a time and place that is appropriate and provides all parties with the clear choice to opt in or out of the discussion.

So, how do we move on from here? How do we as a campus community address the concerns, while still preserving our dedication to free expression and healthy engagement in a discourse (speech) that allows and encourages a plurality of views, beliefs, and life choices to be heard?

I have two approaches that we will implement:

First, our policies on student organizations and the parameters for different categories of tabling events, debates, speakers, and all other associated activities will be examined and enhanced to provide more clarity on what constitutes appropriate engagement in such activities. Further, since LSC has the right to reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of free expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the College, we will establish a meeting space for debates, speakers, controversial conversations, provocative topics, etc. that will be clearly advertised as optional to attend.

Secondly during the Fall 2022 semester, I will call for the formulation of a task force made up of students, faculty, and staff representing a plurality of views and positions to develop and recommend a free expression values statement that aligns with and enhances LSC and Minnesota State policies on both conduct and nondiscrimination/equal educational opportunity. The task force will consider recommendations and practices available from the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education \(FIRE\)](#), as well as the national model for higher education free expression statements from the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago, referred to as the [Chicago Statement](#), and other available and even conflicting models. Working with Minnesota State legal counsel and LSC administration, the task force will engage the entire campus in discussions and open forum events with the goal to develop the LSC free expression statement which will ultimately be presented to LSC leadership for approval and adoption.

I have said this before, and it is worth saying it again today: TOGETHER We can make LSC truly safe, welcoming, and inclusive for all; regardless of sex, race, age, political affiliation, ability/disability, color, creed, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, or status with regard to public assistance.

We have so much to celebrate with each other, so much to learn from each other because we do not have just one view but rather we have many views with a plurality of voices. It is that plurality, that diversity, that ultimately gives us strength and makes this wonderful place we call Lake Superior College. By paying attention to civility and mutual respect, by creating spaces where many voices can be heard without causing fear or hardship to those with any particular view means we are practicing the true meaning of democracy and freedom of expression. **It is everyone's responsibility to be kind to each other and respect differences, even if you do not accept those differences.**

TOGETHER we can do this, LSC!

Patricia L. Rogers, Ph.D.
President
Lake Superior College

Pronouns: She, Her, Hers -- [More about pronouns](#)