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UVSC complements LDS values

By William A. Sederburg and David R. Keller

**my
view**

Over the past decade, Utah Valley State College — and the community within which it is embedded — has changed considerably. And with change comes anxiety.

During the present academic year, a variety of campus events have irritated many stakeholders in UVSC's future, including parents, alumni and our legislative delegation. Some worry that our "moral compass" has gone askew, that UVSC threatens to unravel some of the critical stitches in the fabric of local tradition.

Placing these recent events in a historical context ought to assuage a majority of such concerns.

UVSC has grown dramatically. This growth has necessitated modifications in the structure and function of the school. While our former concentration centered, appropriately, on vocational and technical training, now UVSC is involved in the open study of social issues. As is to be expected, once social issues are broached, differences of opinion arise.

The crux of recent consternation seems to be about UVSC's increasing engagement in public policy debate and the inclusion of potentially controversial social issues of our curriculum. Yet, such debate and curriculum development are befitting of a four-year institution of higher education. This expansion of programming was not stimulated internally, but rather has been in direct response to evolving community demands. In the past, Brigham Young University met much of the community's need for liberal arts education, but now BYU has adopted highly selective admission standards. Increasing numbers of students now turn to UVSC for baccalaureate education.

President Sederburg was quoted in these pages saying, essentially, that UVSC is not and cannot be a satellite of BYU (Dec. 10, 2004). Sadly, this was misinterpreted as meaning that UVSC intended to repudiate the LDS value system that characterizes BYU. The real intent of the statement, however, was to bring attention to the inherent difference in the missions of private religious schools on one hand and public schools on the other.

While BYU and UVSC serve the same population for the most part — people of the LDS faith — the missions of the two schools are intrinsically dissimilar. As a private church institution, education at BYU is focused through an ecclesiastical lens, as it should be.

In contrast, education at publicly supported schools must remain neutral with regard to religion. This is absolutely essential in fostering a learning atmosphere amenable to students who come from a variety of religious backgrounds or no religious background at all.

There seems to be some worry off campus that the inherently secular mission of UVSC, as opposed

to the faith-oriented mission of BYU, is a threat, generally speaking, to the mores of the community.

Happily, this is not true. Public education does not necessarily undermine religious belief systems. In fact, a secular education complements faith by providing individuals with conceptual tools for understanding theology. Humans, it would seem, are endowed with reason for a reason.

Simply put, public education should be seen as complementary to the foundation of faith. Should our students seek to enhance their education with exploration of faith, they may do so through the LDS Institute — the largest in the world — and other religious organizations.

In the parlance of American political discourse, UVSC's mission is traditional and conservative. UVSC aims to uphold the ideals that this great nation was founded on: pluralism, democracy, the free expression of ideas and freedom of association.

Institutions of higher education have important duties to society, both in terms of nurturing ethical employees and engaged citizens. We strongly feel that UVSC is an asset, rather than a menace, to the moral integrity of Utah Valley.

As in any open society, disputes will bubble to the surface of public discourse from time to time. Yet, we all benefit if we learn, in the words of UVSC Community Relations Committee member Val Hale, to disagree agreeably.

The fabric of American society is woven from the warp of freedom and the weft of mutual respect. UVSC's mission is to inspire and advance these foundational American values.

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