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UVSC stays true to its core values

David R. Keller and William A. Sederburg
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A great deal of attention has been given to Utah Valley State College since Michael Moore visited our campus last fall. Recently, citizens and legislators have expressed concern about the "moral direction" of the school.

To many Utah County residents, it seems that campus activities are declining into some sort of amoral anarchy contrary to "community values."

Fortunately, nothing could be further from the truth.

Some disquiet exists between all universities and the communities within which they dwell due to the very essence of higher education. In the case of UVSC, demographic changes have necessitated transformations in our mission, and part of the anxiety of late is the result of UVSC's gradual expansion of university programming beyond our tradition origin as a technical/community college.

UVSC is now one of the 100 largest institutions of higher education in the United States. As a major state university, UVSC has an ethical commitment to represent the pluralistic nature of America. American society is, and always has been, composed of people with a variety of ethnic, racial, religious and political backgrounds.

Because we provide educational services to a diverse population, mutual trust and academic freedom are core values at UVSC. We want to reassure all stakeholders in UVSC's future - students, faculty, parents, legislators, administrators, staff and taxpayers - that we are resolutely committed to both principles.

First, UVSC is firmly committed to encouraging mutual respect. Because learning cannot take place in a hostile atmosphere, mutual trust and respect are central to UVSC's educational experience.

Religious freedom strikes to the core of American government. UVSC will not tolerate any unprofessional denigration of religious faith, whether Latter-day Saint, Lutheran, animist, Buddhist, Jain or Muslim.

As an institution focused on providing opportunities, we value and support all students, regardless of world view. To this end, our goal is to ensure that persons of all backgrounds and belief systems feel welcome and comfortable on campus.

Second, UVSC is firmly committed to academic freedom. Academic freedom strikes to the core of intellectual discovery. It is UVSC's duty to uphold Utah Board of Regents policy that "academic freedom exists . . . not primarily to serve the interests of the faculty, but for the benefit of the society in which they function."

Practically speaking, to fulfill our mission and achieve our full potential as a quality regional university, UVSC needs to conform to national standards and accreditation guidelines. This includes the protection of academic freedom and compliance with federal non-discrimination law. Doing so will ensure the credibility of our certificates and degrees throughout the county and abroad.

Academically speaking, institutions of higher education are forums for the origination of new - and sometimes controversial - ideas. This function serves democracy. As long as there is no infringement upon the first principle of mutual respect, academic freedom is held inviolable. Given the high caliber of our faculty, we are confident that academic freedom will seldom come into conflict with the precondition of guaranteeing an amicable learning environment.

As UVSC continues to be a venue for candid dialogue, at times certain campus activities may not enjoy the overwhelming approval of the surrounding community. Yet, in the long run, the freedom of expression serves the common good.

Providing forums for open discussion and respecting community mores are not mutually exclusive. The

challenge is to fulfill this role in a constructive, rather than contentious, manner.

As Thomas Jefferson repeatedly emphasized, public education is essential for democracy. Democracy, in turn, depends upon the voicing of a multiplicity of perspectives in an inoffensive and civil manner. In this way, UVSC merely aims to fulfill the directive we have been given by the people of the state.

From on or off campus, whether liberal or conservative, sectarian or secular, we all aim at the same thing: to secure and protect the ideals of a free and open society while treating all citizens with mutual respect.

William A. Sederburg is president of Utah Valley State College, where David R. Keller is director of the Study of Ethics and associate professor of philosophy.