

October 31, 2017

Senators Erdman, Brewer and Halloran,

In response to the letter you distributed to Nebraska news media recently about the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I believe you, the legislature and the citizens of Nebraska deserve to hear the facts.

First, all at the university have dedicated their careers to furthering education, research and service to society. Some faculty have liberal views. Others have conservative views. To recklessly and falsely accuse the university as a whole of hostility toward a particular view appears to be an attempt to further political agendas.

The university will not be politicized and will not be used as a pawn. I find your falsehoods and distortions defamatory and an egregious breach of the trust that Nebraskans put in each of us.

Free speech exists at our university every day in all places. It's true one of our employees, who was simply asking that a table moved to a designated area for table displays and recruitment, erroneously used the phrase "free speech zones." The employee was referencing a policy in which groups not affiliated with the university can register to put up displays or make presentations in an area on the Nebraska Union Plaza. Because Turning Point USA was not affiliated with the university in any way, the employee was simply trying to enforce a policy, and in that, he used an inaccurate phrase. We have repeatedly made clear since August 25 that we welcome free speech across our campuses. There were no statements retracted or changed.

You reference an October 23 meeting and make several accusations regarding the meeting that are untrue.

First, I personally asked Kaitlyn Mullen to join me in reviewing the facts of our investigation of the August 25 interaction. I made every attempt to ensure this was a comfortable environment, and I was clear that this meeting was informational only, not in any way representative of action toward or about Ms. Mullen. In my over 30 years as an educator interacting with students from all walks of life, I have always taken steps to ensure these interactions are transparent and warm. We are here to help students succeed, not to provide content for national organizations to mischaracterize and use to promote their agendas; thus our request that the meeting not be recorded.

Second, we do not communicate disciplinary action regarding any employee except to the employee involved and his or her supervisors, so what you report is untrue. We did, however, make expressly clear to Ms. Mullen, as we did publicly, that we concluded the behavior exhibited by one of the faculty members involved in the August 25 interaction was inappropriate. As we have said publicly, we told Ms. Mullen that appropriate action had been taken directly with one individual, and that is a matter of personnel record.

Third, I shared a surveillance tape in relation to this incident with the purpose of ensuring that the parties involved in the disagreement on August 25 understood the facts of the matter. Where the camera automatically points every 10 minutes is not a “mystery,” it’s simply a camera setting that is intended to provide a comprehensive view of the area.

Your accusations about our English Department’s web page are also untrue. I invite all to peruse the department’s home page at <https://www.unl.edu/english/undergraduate>. There, anyone can see our majors—which include creative writing, and a number of other areas. Additionally, the poster or signage you accuse the department of displaying is not present.

It is also untrue that I said I was unaware of the contents of the English Department’s website. I was asked in the October 23 meeting if I had read the English Department’s website recently, and I said that I had not. My focus is on leading this university, not checking website content on a daily basis.

To put all of this in perspective, the genesis of your letter appears to be one 20-minute interaction at the university that we appropriately addressed. We have concluded our investigation and actions stemming from this matter, and now, as we do every day, are focused on delivering our critically important mission—a mission made possible by faculty, staff and students committed to bettering the lives of others. The thousands and thousands of hours that students, faculty, and staff spend interacting across the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s campuses every day freely and civilly, in fact, represent the norm. Portrayals that the August 25 interaction is the norm are simply not true, and such falsehoods and baseless accusations are clearly not in the best interest of Nebraskans or of their University.

I’m left wondering, after re-reading your letter to the news media, to what end? What effect are these coordinated attacks on the University of Nebraska, an institution that so many hold dear, intended to achieve?

I appeal to us all to not let falsehoods and internet trolls disrupt the way we behave as Nebraskans. Let’s support the university’s mission, and return to the decorum that furthers Nebraskans’ interests.

I sincerely hope that my letter today allows you to see that this matter is not always being factually represented to you by others, and that you will come to me directly with any further questions you may have for clarification.

Thanks for your service to Nebraska.

Sincerely,



Ronnie D. Green, Ph.D.  
Chancellor

c: Hank Bounds, President, University of Nebraska  
Donde Plowman, UNL Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer  
Laurie Bellows, UNL Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs  
Bob Whitehouse, Chair, University of Nebraska Board of Regents