

The University of Vermont

Office of the President

January 18, 2008

To: University of Vermont Faculty, Staff, and Students

From: Daniel Mark Fogel, President

Re: Forum at the Davis Center

I deeply appreciate the passion and commitment shown by so many caring members of the UVM community with respect to the presence of the Vermont Marriage Advisory Council (VMAC) in the Davis Center on Saturday, January 19, 2008. I have deep empathy for those who are affronted by the ideas and positions opposing gay marriage that are espoused by VMAC (positions which I personally find objectionable).

With that said, I do not believe the University can be in the position of vetting the ideas and positions of every group that uses campus facilities, including the Davis Center; nor can UVM practice selective exclusion of certain points of view. The imperative for the free exchange of ideas so important to the academy militates against our doing so, no matter how disagreeable the ideas may be.

I am of course troubled that the sense of the campus as a safe and supportive place may be shaken by the presence of certain speakers and groups. But the principle of free speech in this marketplace of ideas needs to be unambiguously upheld. I am profoundly grateful for the very constructive perspectives that many on campus bring to controversies such as this, and the recognition that these situations can present genuine and unexpected opportunities for dialogue, learning, and community building. I wish to thank all who have been engaged in initiating frank, open, and constructive communication around this question. As we engage in open dialogue on a difficult issue, I ask that at the same time we continue to actively support our LGBTQ colleagues, friends, and students.

Difficult and painful as this situation is, I believe it represents an essential part of being a university. To quote U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, "Sunlight is the best disinfectant."

Thanks to all of those who are working to build community at UVM

With appreciation,

Daniel Mark Fogel