

Feb. 9, 2017

Professor Fred Evans

Department of Philosophy

330 College Hall

Dear Fred,

Thanks to you and your colleagues for your thoughtful expression of concern regarding members of the Duquesne community who may be impacted by recent executive orders. I have carefully considered the points you made and have several thoughts to offer.

First, as I stated in my previous message to faculty, staff and students, we are deeply committed as a Catholic-Spiritan institution to the well-being of our entire campus community, including non-U.S. citizens, immigrants and others who have long been part of our Duquesne family. I can assure you that we have already taken steps to reach out to those on campus who are potentially impacted by the recent action by the executive branch in Washington, and we are continuing to make our administrative team available to assist them with questions and concerns.

Second, as you are aware, we are a private, non-profit, tax exempt institution of higher education. For that reason, we refrain from engaging in political activity which might jeopardize our tax exempt status – one of the many ways in which, as President Richard Brodhead notes, we are not “immune from the rule of law.” Thus, I have been careful to focus on the legitimate concerns of our institution that flow from our Catholic-Spiritan mission and identity, without crossing the line to take political or partisan positions.

Third, there are myriad letters supporting immigrants such as the one you reference, and there will likely be many more on a variety of topics in the coming months. In alignment with our mission and identity, I signed the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities letter along with more than 130 other Catholic university presidents, which you can read here:  
[http://www.accunet.org/files/Press\\_Media/2017-Executive-Order-Press-Release.pdf](http://www.accunet.org/files/Press_Media/2017-Executive-Order-Press-Release.pdf).

Fourth, the campus forum which I have organized along with my administrative team, entitled “Race and Cultural Understanding in a New Era,” has been in the planning stages since July. It is not designed as a forum for expressing political views one way or another with respect to the current administration in Washington. To the contrary, it is designed primarily for our Duquesne students (faculty and staff are also invited), to expose them to the fundamental concept that it is possible to discuss even the most controversial topics in our society without attacking the opposing side or treating those individuals with differing views with disrespect or contempt. I feel very strongly that we, as educators, owe a duty to our students to avoid engaging in the harsh and disrespectful rhetoric that has regrettably become commonplace in the media and elsewhere in modern society. Our students will learn to analyze and formulate positions on difficult issues most responsibly, consistent with the core values that have long defined Duquesne, if they learn to exhibit profound respect for other individuals engaged in dialogue – even those with whom they sharply disagree. This is the essence of civil discourse. It is one of the central purposes of hosting this forum on February 13.

Fifth, for that very reason, it would be inappropriate for me to “publicly respond” to your letter at the forum. The event is being moderated by Esther Bush, President of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, and David Hickton, who recently completed eight years of exemplary service as United States Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania. These two individuals are well-respected professionals who have extensive experience with respect to the sensitive topics that they and the panelists will be discussing. It would be inappropriate for me to inject political commentary or a declaration concerning how the University plans to deal with complex legal and administrative issues that are still in flux. Indeed, to do so would be contrary to the very purpose of the program, which is to expose students to balanced dialogue on difficult issues that confront us as a nation and as a Catholic-Spiritan educational community.

Sixth, while I understand how passionately you and your colleagues hold the convictions expressed in the letter you sent me, there are many students, faculty and staff on campus who hold widely divergent views on these same topics. The University cannot endorse one political view or position over another. Thus, while I respect your desire to make known your strong feelings on recent events taking place on the political front in the United States, there are ample channels available to you and others to do so in your capacities as private citizens that do not compromise the University’s essential status as a non-partisan, non-profit entity.

Finally, I should stress that we are diligently and conscientiously consulting with legal counsel, the Spiritan community who sponsor Duquesne University, and other professionals within higher education, as we take steps that we believe are most responsible in terms of caring for all members of our campus community.

I am certainly appreciative that you have shared your views and concerns; this input will be considered as we seek to act responsibly on behalf of the entire campus community in the months

ahead. In light of your deeply-held views on this subject, which I respect as both genuine and heartfelt, I would be pleased to meet with you at some point in the next week or so to hear a more complete articulation of your views. Thanks again for the time and care that you put into preparing this letter. I look forward to meeting and to having the chance to chat sometime soon.

Warm Regards,

Ken

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