

September 15, 2006

Provost Marty W. Krauss  
Brandeis University  
MS 134

Dear Marty,

I am writing you in your capacity as Provost and as a member of the University Policy Review Committee concerning the report of the Committee on Exhibitions and Expression, which I have read with care. I appreciate its constructive tone. The fundamental issue that the Committee was called upon to address is a very difficult one for private universities, and there are, in my judgment, no easy or obvious answers. While the report leaves some questions open, it includes positive proposals and highlights matters that are deserving of further discussion and attention by the faculty.

I think there is universal agreement that, in the words of the report, the University should "...encourage the widest possible expression of divergent views," recognizing at the same time that "...individual rights to free expression entail a responsibility to respect the rights of others." To this, I would add the collective responsibility we all have to promote a campus community environment of civility that is considered welcoming by all of its members and is also conducive to the broadest possible discussion of all issues, especially the painful or difficult ones. Equally important, as the report acknowledges, is the requirement that challenging issues especially should be dealt with in an educational and scholarly context. Here, the faculty has a critical responsibility and role to play in promoting the discussion of these issues, most especially the difficult ones, in a context focused on scholarship and civility. The difficult part, of course, in setting limits is determining where the lines are to be drawn and by whom.

The report very appropriately takes note of the fact that at present the University does not have clear policies

regarding those public spaces on campus that are suitable for exhibitions, nor does it have clear policies regarding approval mechanisms for mounting student exhibitions. I propose to address these omissions by authorizing the formulation of a University policy on this subject, which the University Policy Review Committee will review and consider in light of all of the suggestions made by the Committee on Exhibitions and Expression. As part of the review process, the UPRC should obtain appropriate input from all of the constituencies that would be affected by the policy, including faculty, staff and students. Input from the faculty might include consultation with the Faculty Senate and other individuals and groups of faculty.

The committee's highlighting of the wide variety of programming concerning the Middle East that is scheduled for the fall semester is very much appreciated. I hope that the initiatives specifically cited in the committee's report, as well as the other events currently in the planning stages, will receive a very positive response from the members of both the campus and off-campus communities. It is important to remember, however, that the issue of free and open expression is a far broader issue than discussions and initiatives regarding the Middle East alone.

Please feel free to share this letter with the members of the Committee on Exhibitions and Expression.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely,

Jehuda Reinharz

JR: dbm