

Respect freedom of speech



COMMENTARY

Anne
Leavitt

The University mission statement reminds us that "freedom of thought and expression is the bedrock principle on which all university activity is based." The brochure "Speaking Out at the UO" echoes the idea: "A university — and the University of Oregon in particular — is a place of educational opportunity, a place to rub elbows and to share ideas with the rest of the world."

It is important to remember these words as we begin our new school year. Next week, on Oct. 11, 12 and 13, we will see our commitment to free expression put into action. On these days a registered University student organization has invited an anti-abortion group to our campus.

This group plans to set up a series of panels in the area of the EMU, with highly graphic pictures and historical references designed to provoke emotional responses from viewers and passers-by.

Organizers say the display is meant to serve as "an open forum for the exchange of ideas while giving us the opportunity to explain why abortion is genocide and why it cannot be tolerated by civilized society." Members plan to engage in discussions only with those who approach the exhibit to talk to them. They also plan to place signs within one block of the site warning pedestrians that they are nearing disturbing images.

Individual response to this display is, of course, up to the individual. Responses should be tempered, however, with an awareness of the rights and responsibilities we share under state law and University conduct codes.

The University is committed to protecting both visitors and members of the University campus community who might disagree

with the views presented. Those disagreeing with the content or the medium of expression offered by these visitors to our campus need to be mindful of our commitment to ensuring opportunities for the expression of opposing views.

I encourage everyone to respect the right of freedom of speech even when such speech may be offensive to one's own personal beliefs and feelings.

Controversial ideas remind us of the challenge of supporting diversity and encouraging the free exchange of ideas, even the ones we might find troublesome, infuriating or offensive.

Thank you for your help in maintaining our campus as a place of open and civil debate and discussion — especially when the topics are controversial. Please contact me at 346-1129 if you have additional questions.

Leavitt is the associate vice president for student affairs. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper. ASUO President Wylie Chen is a co-signer of this letter.

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