

7 November 2010

Chancellor Michael A. Wartell  
Vice Chancellor George S. McCellan  
Kettler Hall  
Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne

Dear Chancellor Wartell and Vice Chancellor McClellan:

We, the undersigned members of the IPFW faculty, would like to express our deep disappointment over the recent exhibit held on the IPFW campus with approval from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs—the so-called Genocide Awareness Project created by the Center for Bio-ethical Reform.

As faculty we work every day to cultivate in our students critical thinking skills, to help them acquire knowledge and apply that knowledge, to “demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to be ... responsible citizens ... in local ... communities,” with the hopes that our students will “demonstrate a commitment to free and open inquiry and mutual respect across multiple cultures and perspectives”—all pillars of IPFW’s Baccalaureate Framework. In particular, one of the important lessons that we try to impart to our students is that words have meanings, that one can not simply take words and concepts and fill them with whatever meaning seems convenient. This is a particularly important lesson to learn at a time in our history when words like “fascism,” “socialism,” “communism,” “tyranny,” and “genocide” are regularly misused for political purposes in contemporary discourse.

Allowing an exhibit on campus that willfully and grossly misuses the word “genocide”—a word with a rich history and a clear meaning (and not simply a catch-all to describe something you don’t like)—undermines everything we try to do as faculty members. Allowing the exhibit to take place on our campus provides legitimacy to this intellectually unsound and irresponsible exhibit, which in turn diminishes the intellectual legitimacy of IPFW. The exhibit’s approach—the misappropriation of the term “genocide”—is also a gross insult to the memory of the millions of people who were in fact victims of genocides and to all those people who have worked and continue to work to prevent genocides from taking place in the world.

Regarding the images themselves, in our culture we have a general consensus that images of death and dying inhibit rational discourse and are exploitative of the privacy of the dead and dying and at least potentially exploitative of the emotions of the viewer. For this reason, when news media display images of death and dying, people object vehemently, leading, for example, to the uproar over print and television images of people falling from the burning World Trade Center towers. Such objections stem in part from the trauma of experiencing unavoidable, unsought exposure to images of death and dying. IPFW is an academic workplace for students, staff, and faculty. If Americans as a

culture have agreed that we should not have to be confronted against our will with pictures of dead bodies while we eat our TV dinners before the nightly news, we can perhaps also agree that students on their way to exams and all of us on our way to activities that require mental focus should not have to look at dead bodies on our way there.

Images of death and dying should not be censored, but such images can be used irresponsibly, to deliberately provoke emotional responses and to short-circuit rational discussion. Rather than promoting discussion and the educational exchange of ideas, the display was engineered to create a judgmental and contentious environment. By equating abortion with the Holocaust, it cast anyone with an opposing viewpoint as being the moral equivalent of a Nazi—an antagonistic message that one could reasonably expect would provoke our student body through derogatory rather than constructive interaction. The fact that steel railings had been set up to keep students at bay is further evidence that organizers had expected confrontation; the display was intentionally inflammatory and had no place on our campus.

By allowing this imposing, professionally constructed display run largely by non-students to operate during class time in a prominent location on campus, the university appears to tacitly endorse the Genocide Awareness Program and the Center for Bio-ethical Reform that created it. To protect the university's academic integrity, we ask the administration to distance itself from the Genocide Awareness Project by publicly and clearly rejecting the Genocide Awareness Project's message that abortion is a form of genocide and GAP's tactic of promoting graphic imagery on campus settings.

Sincerely,

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