

November 10, 2015

### **Debriefing of On-Campus Event**

Dear Goucher College Community:

As some of you may know, last week a group of Goucher Hillel and Gopher Israel students planned a screening of the film *Mom and Dad: I Have Something to Tell You*, and another group of students protested, including some members of TALQ BIG, Goucher's LGBTQIA student group. There's been a lot of discussion of this event, especially on social media, and while we will continue to follow up in person, we thought everyone should know how we prepared, what happened, and what the college will do going forward.

In advance of the event, Luz Burgos-López, assistant dean of students for race, equity, and identity, met with representatives from both Hillel/Gopher Israel and TALQ BIG, encouraging the student leaders to speak directly to one another and for themselves, and we sent an email to the entire campus, explaining the section of the Code of Conduct relevant to student protests. As we stated in this email on November 4, the Code of Conduct does not allow for one group of students to disrupt or obstruct the event of another group. Student Affairs staff members also engaged in discussions prior to the event with both Hillel/Gopher Israel and the student protest leaders regarding logistical questions and plans.

At the Thursday event itself, five public safety officers and five staff members were present from start to finish, and all students were safe the entire time.

At 7:30 p.m. the invited speaker, Assi Azar, screened the film and then spoke and answered questions from the audience. Student protestors had assembled to protest with signs outside the auditorium. They also entered the auditorium and watched the film with pink tape covering their mouths. After the film, protestors verbally disrupted the event temporarily, but the speaker then actively engaged them in reciprocal dialogue.

After 45 minutes of Q&A, college officials became concerned about the dynamic of the dialogue and decided to end the event. The protestors and most audience members departed around 9 p.m. without incident, although some students chose to stay and process the event with staff until about 11 p.m.

The day after this event, students from both sides of this disagreement met to share a meal and fellowship during a Rainbow Shabbat. We congratulate these students for setting aside their discomfort and differences to build relationships and community.

Moving forward, we will be evaluating actions before, during, and after the event to determine if any Code of Conduct violations occurred, and if they did, we will deal with them fairly, as set forth in college policies.

One thing that has become apparent from this experience is that we need to create a clear and comprehensive protest and dissension policy, and we are researching such policies at other colleges. We will share the proposed procedure for policy revisions as soon as possible, and it will clearly affirm the

right of student organizations and academic departments to sponsor events on campus without disruption, regardless of ideology or topic. It also will affirm community members' rights to dissent and protest, as long as they respect the college's policies, property, and processes.

In the meantime, each of us needs to think about how we can work toward being a community that is more comfortable with disagreement.

Anyone in the Goucher community who would like to discuss the event or any of the underlying ideas or disagreements that the event highlighted is encouraged to reach out to Chaplain Cynthia Terry at 410-337-6048; Rabbi Josh Snyder at 410-337-6404; or Luz Burgos-López, assistant dean of students for race, equity, and identity, at 410-337-6532; or to schedule an appointment at Goucher's counseling center at 410-337-6481.

This was an intense experience intellectually and emotionally for some students, and we hope all sides can honor the difficult feelings that conflicts like this might generate. In the end, we have all chosen to be one learning community and to respect one another even as we disagree—perhaps especially when we disagree.

Sincerely,

José Bowen, President

Bryan Coker, Vice President and Dean of Students

Leslie Lewis, Provost