

## ADVISORY MEMORANDUM

TO: the LCC community

FROM: Diversity Council

DATE: June 9, 2017

RE: Holiday display recommendations

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As a governing body of Lane Community College, and as the body charged with advising the college community on matters of diversity, access, equity and inclusion, the Diversity Council hereby presents the following advisory statement regarding the display of holiday or religious symbols on the Lane Community College campus.

### **Why it Matters**

Lane welcomes students and employees of all cultures and faiths, and strives to maintain a healthy and balanced work environment for all. Lane Community College Diversity Council acknowledges that holiday celebrations, both religious and secular, are often culturally important to LCC employees and students, as well as community members who use college spaces. Additionally, we recognize the legal responsibilities and protections inherent in the operation of a public educational institution. Balancing the interests and responsibilities of the entire college community does not lend itself to a set of hard and fast rules in this area. Instead, the council offers guidelines to departments for use in planning holiday decorations or displays within their respective areas.

While we believe that the college should be as inclusive and flexible as possible in terms of individual expression during holidays, celebrations, and cultural observances, there are a few standards that must be met by all college employees in order to comply with federal law in this area:

1. As a public educational institution, LCC may not advance or endorse religion, non-religion, or one religion over any other. Therefore, religious symbols or displays should never be placed in such a way that they appear to be expressions of the college rather than expressions of an individual employee.
2. Additionally, the college must protect the rights of individuals to freely exercise their beliefs.

Through the LCC Strategic Plan 2017-2021, the college has identified a strategic direction of Access, Equity and Inclusion through Social Justice, and a strategic objective to develop a culture of inclusivity and respect through dialogue, outreach, education, and equitable policies and practices. Supporting these ideals can be a challenging task, and requires meaningful, respectful communication within and among work groups.

### **Guidelines for Displays**

Within the college, distinctions may be made between public and private spaces. Private spaces are those areas assigned exclusively to a single employee. Coworkers may occasionally view a private space, but it is never viewed by a student or member of the public. Generally speaking, there are very few private work spaces on the LCC college campus. As a general rule, most displays should be considered as public, and any planning for displays that may be considered religious in nature should take care to avoid any appearance of a college endorsement of any religion, non-religion, or one religion over any other. If there is ever a potential for students or members of the public to be present in your workspace at any time, it is not a private workspace and should be considered a public space. Employees are encouraged to contact Human Resources or the Chief Diversity Officer for guidance about the difference between public and private work space, or about holiday displays in general.

Note that these guidelines apply to personal or group/department displays. They do not apply to educational activities that reference or teach about religious customs, symbols, or texts. Educational displays should be clearly framed as secular in nature and should neither advance nor inhibit any religion, non-religion, or one religion over any other. Educational activities or displays may be appropriate in a classroom setting or in student/public common areas, and should be designed with a distinct educational purpose in mind.

Holiday displays may reasonably vary from department to department according to the faith and comfort level of employees in a given area. All college employees in all departments, regardless of whether holiday displays have been placed in past years, should follow these guidelines to ensure an inclusive, respectful workplace for all:

- Talk to coworkers at all levels in your work area as you plan any holiday display, whether religious or secular in nature. Any discussion of holiday displays should include the timeline and exact location, as well as a description of the display planned.
- Be mindful of the fact that even coworkers who have shared workspace for an extended period of time may not be comfortable with holiday displays. Be careful not to make assumptions about the beliefs or culture of others.
- Holiday celebrations such as potlucks, gift exchanges, or parties, should always be voluntary in nature and should not interrupt the work environment of those who may choose not to participate. Managers especially should ensure their participation in such activities does not create an unspoken or implied expectation that supervised

employees must to participate as well.

- If a co-worker expresses discomfort about a display, it should not be interpreted as a personal affront to any religion or practice. Individuals are of course entitled to worship or celebrate in any fashion they choose, or not at all.

The goal of these guidelines is not to restrict expression of faith or culture, but to ensure an environment that does not distract from our primary work at the college. All efforts should be made to create a constructive work environment, whether or not holiday displays are present. If you need assistance with communication around holiday displays, please contact Human Resources or the Chief Diversity Officer for assistance.

Signed on behalf of Diversity Council:

*/s/ 06/09/17*

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Sarah Lushia, Chair

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Greg Evans, Vice Chair