



**Address at the Miami-Dade Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce
"Diversity Inclusion in Education"
EXPOSure Luncheon**

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on March 31, 2017**



This speech was presented to the attendees of the Miami Dade Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce "Diversity Inclusion in Education" EXPOsure Luncheon, on March 31, 2017.

Good afternoon, thank you for having me! Every day, we face new challenges. Exclusivity, uncivility and divisiveness. Rising anger and frustration. Extremism that is bleeding into the mainstream. Uncivility that is all too common in speech and actions, in how we treat one another. These are issues that touch all of us. How do we respond? Especially for our society's most marginalized groups – who often feel the brunt of these acts of extremism and uncivility – what do they feel, how do they respond?

It has been a year since HB2, North Carolina's controversial bathroom law passed. North Carolina's governor called it a "dark anniversary." Dark, indeed. Types of public prejudice like this are damaging and hurtful to so many.

Just this month, USA Today College published a story titled "*LGBT students fear for their futures*" that echoed the same fears many voiced last year about HB2. LGBTQA students across our country are worrying about something that no young person should have to worry about at this time in their life – that their rights could be taken away.

This is heart wrenching. This should not be a reality. So, I ask again – in these challenging, uncertain times, how are we left feeling? Motivated! These challenges motivate us to do better, to do right for our community and for our world.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Dr. once said: "The time is always right to do what is right." These are words we live by! We're focused on doing what is right and what is good for our entire community. Everyone has a place at FIU.

LGBTQA students are among the most marginalized on any campus. It's been well documented that they drop out of school at a higher rate, because of bullying and harassment. This gets in the way of their success. It gets in the way of their future. All of us here share a singular sense of purpose – we're here because we embrace our responsibility. We want to leave the world a better place than we found it.

We know that acceptance, tolerance and diversity make for a better future for this entire community! FIU's goal is to be a safe haven for those who don't feel safe out there in this world. We want students to come to our campus without feeling like they will be discriminated against or harassed.

Let me tell you how we're making an impact on our students lives... Listen to this! Eight years ago, Jack Zaryckyj started a very personal journey—he began the physical transition from female to male. He changed jobs and schools in three different states. Each time, faced new surroundings and yes, was met with bigotry and close-mindedness. Jack never gave up. He persevered in the face of violent slurs, ridicule and fear. At FIU, he found a community that stands for diversity, freedom and safety for all people! He thrived here! And last December, he graduated with his bachelor of science in nursing!

This is what our FIU is about! Diversity is our strength. Inclusion is our ideal. We want everyone to succeed here! Jack succeeded here, because he felt safe and supported. Over the years, FIU has taken a leading role in the nationwide movement to make college campuses more affirming and accepting.

Here is what we're doing. First, we started and then expanded our Multicultural Programs and Services' Department's LGBTQA initiatives. This has allowed us to develop and implement programs and services for our LGBTQA community. Today, FIU is also one of the few universities to have a dedicated staff member to serve the LGBTQA population! FIU has several clubs, organizations and committees for LGBTQA students, faculty, and staff and their allies. April is LGBTQA Pride month at FIU!

We also started a Safe Zone program that helps train our faculty and staff to assist and serve as resources and support networks for our LGBTQA community. We know how important having a mentor can be, so we started the LGBTQA mentoring program that is now in its fourth year. It pairs LGBTQA students with faculty and staff who provide guidance and support and serve as strong role models for our students. This is truly life-changing work!

If you have the chance to come to one of our campuses, you will also see that we're sending the message that everyone is welcome here. We have 10 gender-neutral bathrooms on our campuses!

We're providing the opportunity to learn more about LGBTQA issues. We offer an undergraduate Certificate in Queer Studies. We know our LGBTQA students are outstanding leaders. That is why every spring, we recognize and celebrate their academic achievements and leadership contributions to the university at the Lavender Graduation and Student Recognition Dinner!

It's important that LGBTQA alumni have the chance to stay connected! That is why we're working on creating an LGBT Panther Network within our Alumni Association! And that's not all! In April, you'll also see us at the Miami Beach Gay Pride Parade! We have been strong supporters of the Parade for a while now! Each year, more than 300 students, faculty and staff come together to participate in the parade! If you are planning on coming out, be on the lookout for the FIU float!

This is what we mean by doing right and doing good by our community. Together, we can work toward building a better, more inclusive world. Thank you!