



*Commit to*  
**EXPRESSION**

**CAMPUS ACTIVISM TOOLKIT**  
**FALL 2018**



**FIRE** [THEFIRE.ORG](http://THEFIRE.ORG)



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# THE CHALLENGE

## WE CHALLENGE YOU TO:

- 1** Coordinate one or more of the toolkit's campaign activities with the goal of educating your campus community about why the principles of free speech are essential to the core purpose of the university;
- 2** Work toward getting a free speech policy statement adopted by your institution, so that freedom of expression and academic freedom are protected for all students and faculty on campus.

Are you ready to take on this challenge?  
Let FIRE know that you are by [signing up](#) today!



# THE PRIZES

On December 21, 2018, FIRE will announce three (3) winners for the best-executed campaigns on campus.

**In order to qualify for a final prize, campaign participants must update FIRE about their work on campus.**

**[Report your results here.](#)**

Consider taking photos of events, posting on social media, writing follow-ups after each activity, or documenting your efforts in other ways that you can share with FIRE.

All prizes can be adjusted based on the particular needs and dynamics of your group.



“Commit to Expression” T-shirt(s)

\$1,000 activism grant for a future initiative

Honor at the FIRE Student Network Summer Conference

Feature on FIRE’s Newsdesk

Sponsor of a FIRE speaker to speak at your school

Kit of exclusive FIRE swag

Certificate(s) of Achievement



“Commit to Expression” T-shirt(s)

\$500 activism grant for a future initiative

Honor at the FIRE Student Network Summer Conference

Feature on FIRE’s Newsdesk

Sponsor of a FIRE speaker to speak at your school

Certificate(s) of Achievement



“Commit to Expression” T-shirt(s)

\$250 activism grant for a future initiative

Honor at the FIRE Student Network Summer Conference

Feature on FIRE’s Newsdesk

Certificate(s) of Achievement



# THE RUNDOWN

Freedom of expression at America's colleges and universities should be more than just an abstract idea. Without a firm commitment to the values that are so essential to the core purpose of the university, everyone on campus loses. With FIRE's Commit to Expression toolkit for campus activism, you can find inspiration and resources to ensure your university commits to upholding the principles of freedom of expression and academic freedom by working toward your school's adoption of a policy statement based on the University of Chicago's "Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression" (better known as the "Chicago Statement").

The Chicago Statement declares: "Because the University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn."

This statement doesn't merely echo First Amendment principles; it broadly expands upon them, envisioning a campus climate that values free expression as the lifeblood of the university. Students, faculty, and administrators across the nation have been inspired and emboldened by this message, and at the time of this toolkit's publication, a version of the Chicago Statement has been adopted by administrations or faculty bodies at [44 colleges and universities](#).

Unfortunately, the majority of institutions still lack this type of commitment to upholding the values of free speech and academic freedom. FIRE is here to empower students like you to do something about it! By working together with a broad coalition of students, faculty, and administrators representing a cross section of the campus community, you can help enshrine a culture of freedom of expression at your school.

Whether your goal is to campaign, protest, research, or learn in an environment that promotes open inquiry and the free exchange of ideas, a university-endorsed free speech policy statement will give you the power to hold your institution accountable for protecting the rights of its students and faculty. By adopting a free speech statement, your institution will show that it values free expression for all students and faculty, regardless of the subject or viewpoint of their speech. With a strong commitment to freedom of expression in place, students will not fear punishment for exercising their right to speak freely about the issues that are most important to them.

In this toolkit, FIRE provides everything you need to attain an institutional commitment to free speech and academic freedom on campus, and help ensure that a culture of free speech and robust debate is cultivated and prioritized at your school for generations to come.



# THE CHICAGO STATEMENT

## What is the Chicago Statement?

The “Chicago Statement” refers to the [“Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression”](#) at the University of Chicago, which is an eloquent statement of principles embracing free expression. FIRE has [enthusiastically endorsed](#) the Chicago Statement as the gold standard for institutional policy statements regarding free speech and academic freedom since the statement’s introduction in 2015.

## Who has adopted the Chicago Statement?

At the time of this toolkit’s publication, over [40 institutions and faculty bodies](#) have adopted a version of the Chicago Statement. This includes institutions such as Princeton University, the University of Wisconsin system, Georgetown University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and many more.

## Why is adopting the Chicago Statement important?

By adopting the Chicago Statement, your institution will make a commitment to protect free expression for all students and faculty. Free speech benefits everyone on campus, and passage of the Chicago Statement at your school will help to hold your institution accountable for protecting the free expression rights of its students and faculty.

## My school maintains “yellow light” or “red light” speech codes on FIRE’s Spotlight Database. Can we still adopt the Chicago Statement?

Yes. In fact, adopting a version of the Chicago Statement can provide the impetus for speech code reform. Thus, the adoption of the Chicago Statement by non-administrative groups is often an important step toward securing student and faculty free speech rights and achieving FIRE’s highest, “green light” rating. When a faculty senate, university-wide committee, or student government endorses the Chicago Statement, it sends a strong message to university leadership that students and faculty want their speech to be fully protected.

## My university has earned a green light rating from FIRE. Do we still need to adopt the Chicago Statement?

The “green light” rating is given to colleges and universities whose policies nominally protect freedom of speech. Even if your school has received FIRE’s green light rating, it is still important to adopt the Chicago Statement. A free speech statement is a set of principles the university community aspires to achieve. Adopting the Chicago Statement illustrates how the university hopes to cultivate an atmosphere of expression and debate — an endeavor that is important even if university policy already protects free speech.



**I attend a private institution. Is adopting the Chicago Statement right for us?**

Yes! Adopting the Chicago Statement is a great way for private schools to commit to principles of free speech. Private schools generally do not have a legal obligation to uphold freedom of speech under the First Amendment, but that doesn't mean that they shouldn't be encouraged to sustain those values on campus! After all, freedom of thought and inquiry are important to all institutions of higher learning, and adoption of the Chicago Statement is a great way to cement this foundation. Many private institutions — including many religious institutions — have adopted the Chicago Statement for just this reason. For example, Georgetown University, a religious institution, adopted a free speech statement based on Chicago Statement language. Your institution can tailor the statement's language based on its tradition and values.



# HOW IT'S DONE

Through your advocacy, you can urge influential stakeholders on campus to use their power to protect free expression and academic freedom for everyone, no matter the viewpoint. There are four ways that a free speech policy statement may be adopted on your campus: through a student government resolution, the Faculty Senate, the university's governing body — such as a board of trustees — or the institution's leadership.

## Student Government Resolution

Student government resolutions are an effective way to show administrators that the student body stands in support of free speech. Resolutions based on the Chicago Statement often call the faculty and administration to action, imploring them to adopt their own principles of free expression. These types of resolutions provide important groundwork, though are not always necessary, for appealing to the faculty senate and administrators to officially adopt the Chicago Statement.

## Faculty Governing Body

Members of the faculty governing body, like the Faculty Senate, often endorse a version of the Chicago Statement. Faculty members are often motivated to adopt such a statement because it is a strong affirmation of free expression and academic freedom for both faculty and students. Faculty bodies at institutions such as American University, Vanderbilt University, Kenyon College, the University of Denver, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and many more have taken this step to protect and promote free speech on their campuses.

## Official Administrative Adoption

Most often, the leadership of an institution, typically the president or chancellor, will officially endorse a version of the Chicago Statement to demonstrate the university's commitment to the overarching values of freedom of expression. Time and time again leaders of colleges and universities pay lip service to free speech, but don't endorse it in practice. Use our [Leader Statement Database](#) to find out what your college or university president has said about free expression so you can encourage them to make it official and adopt a version of the Chicago Statement!

## University Governing Body

Another way to get the Chicago Statement adopted is to encourage your university's governing board, like the board of trustees or board of regents, to adopt a free speech statement. This high-level endorsement represents an entire higher education system committing itself to free expression. University systems such as the University of Wisconsin, the University of Nebraska, and the University of Missouri, among others, have taken this important step to encourage free expression on all of their campuses.





# CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

While there are many ways to work toward the adoption of a free speech policy statement at your school, there is not just one right way to do it. The campaign actions outlined below are designed to help inspire you to make an impact on campus. Feel free to be creative and tailor these activities to your particular needs, or to come up with something entirely new!

If you need funds to help you get started, email [students@thefire.org](mailto:students@thefire.org) with a note detailing how much funding you'll need and an explanation of how you plan to use these funds. Please be as specific as possible.

Has your school already adopted the Chicago Statement? [Take a look](#) at the list of schools that have adopted the Chicago Statement to find out. Even if your school is listed, there may still be work to be done in order to codify the Chicago Statement on your campus! Check with us at FIRE to make sure all campus stakeholders — faculty, administrators, etc. — are endorsing the Statement. If your school already has a robust free speech statement in place, take the opportunity to praise your institution for embracing free expression by writing an op-ed or hosting an event inviting members of the campus community to learn about, discuss, and celebrate your school's commitment. Do not hesitate to check with FIRE to discuss the steps you can take to hold your school accountable to the commitments it has made.

- 1 Chicago Statement Petition Sign-Ups
- 2 Write an Op-ed
- 3 Tabling with Postcard Appeal
- 4 Alumni Appeal
- 5 Host an Event
- 6 Introduce a Free Speech Statement Resolution to the SGA
- 7 Meet with a Faculty Senate Member
- 8 Meet with a Campus Administrator



## CHICAGO STATEMENT PETITION SIGN-UPS

- If you haven't done so already, take a moment to sign the petition yourself! This [petition](#) states that you support the principles outlined in the Chicago Statement.
- Engage in outreach activities with the goal of getting at least 25 members of the campus community to sign the Chicago Statement petition and voice their support for free expression and open debate at your institution.
- Consider reaching out to your fellow student organization members, friends, classmates, professors, and the leadership of student organizations for help.
- Let members of the campus community know that a university's commitment to free expression is important for everyone, regardless of political leanings.

## WRITE AN OP-ED

- Op-eds are a great way to get the attention of the campus community, including professors, school officials, fellow students, and even alumni. They are also a great way to identify and gain allies. Use an op-ed to go "on the record" about why the adoption of the Chicago Statement is an important step for your college.
- Check out [some examples](#) for inspiration for how to write your op-ed. Read through FIRE's resource on [how to place an op-ed](#) or letter to the editor in your campus newspaper for more help and inspiration.

## TABLING WITH POSTCARD APPEAL

- Set up a table in a heavily trafficked part of campus and speak with passersby about why it's important for your school to formally commit itself to free speech.
- Ask members of the campus community to sign postcards to school leadership supporting the adoption of the Chicago Statement. Encourage them to describe the issues they are passionate about and why it's important that they be able to advocate for them freely.
- After you've finished your tabling and postcard signing initiative, deliver the postcards to the highest ranking administrator at your school, like the president or chancellor. With the postcards, include the [Chicago Statement](#) and a letter describing why the adoption of the Chicago Statement is essential for your campus community. See "Sample Letter to Administrator" below for inspiration.
- [Request postcards from FIRE!](#)



## ALUMNI APPEAL

- Alumni hold a great deal of influence when advocating for change on campus. College administrators aim to keep alumni happy, and generally listen closely to alumni when they call attention to an issue of concern.
- Start by networking with alumni at on-campus events and at homecoming or alumni weekends. Use these opportunities to describe the importance of a university commitment to freedom of expression, explain your efforts on campus, and enlist alumni support in achieving your goals.
- Work with other student organizations and ask them to reach out to their alumni. Share a sample email with the group's leaders that they can send to their alumni to explain the situation and ask for their support.

### Sample Email to Alumni

Dear [YOUR INSTITUTION] alumn[us/a/i]:

My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am a member of the class of 20[XX] at [YOUR INSTITUTION]. In order to improve the climate for free expression on our campus, I ask you to join me in urging [YOUR INSTITUTION] to adopt a free speech statement in the model of the “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression” at the University of Chicago (better known as the “Chicago Statement”). This eloquent and overarching statement of principles endorses free speech and inquiry, noting that “it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”

If [YOUR INSTITUTION] were to adopt such a statement, it would convey to students, faculty members, alumni like yourself, and the concerned public that [YOUR INSTITUTION] is a place where one need not fear censorship or punishment for engaging in constitutionally protected expression, and where all members of the campus community will be able to fully participate in the give-and-take of the “marketplace of ideas” on campus. I would be proud to see [YOUR INSTITUTION] take a leading role in the national discourse concerning freedom of speech by encouraging robust dialogue and debate among its students and faculty. Please join me in this important campaign! You can help by [writing a letter](#) to the administration as a concerned alumni, by signing the [Chicago Statement petition](#), and by supporting current students like me who are working to get a free speech policy statement adopted on campus.

Sincerely,  
[YOUR NAME]




## HOST AN EVENT

- Educate your campus community about the importance of passing the Chicago Statement by hosting an event:
  - [Invite a member of FIRE's staff](#) to your campus to discuss the adoption of a free speech statement at your school.
    - If you can't afford travel costs, ask us about hosting a Skype session. If you prefer an in-person event but don't have the funds, ask us about FIRE grants.
  - Host a panel with community members who endorse your school's adoption of a free speech statement.
- Reach out to a diverse range of student groups on campus and ask if they would be willing to work with you. The adoption of a free speech statement benefits everyone, and support from a diverse range of students will carry more weight with campus administrators.

## INTRODUCE A FREE SPEECH STATEMENT RESOLUTION TO THE SGA

- Educate the student government association or governing body at your school about the importance of adopting a version of the Chicago Statement.
  - If you go to a public institution, explain how the university has an obligation to uphold the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but that valuing free speech should be more than just a legal obligation.
  - If you attend a private institution and your institution promises students free expression rights, explain how your university can go the extra step by passing the Chicago Statement to demonstrate its commitment.
  - Whether you attend a public or private university, educate your school's student governing body about the Chicago Statement, its principles, and the important protections that it offers.
- Discuss the important role that free speech plays in higher education, not merely for open discourse but also for academic freedom. Show how a statement in support of free speech can help your school take a stand for student and faculty rights.
- Ask the student governing body to [pass a resolution in support of the Chicago Statement](#).
- Share the resolution throughout the campus community via email, social media, tabling events, and word of mouth.
- Build a coalition of students representing a cross section of the campus community.

- 
- Request to have hearings and panel discussions in an effort to influence the administration.
  - Work to develop a rapport with at least one member of the Student Senate or governing body. Be open and willing to work with the student senate to help write and propose revisions and repeals of speech-restrictive policies, and provide updates to the administration.
  - Make your work visible by publishing articles in the campus newspaper detailing your initiative.

### MEET WITH A FACULTY SENATE MEMBER

- Start by identifying faculty members who will be enthusiastic about this initiative. If you have a close working relationship with a faculty member, reach out to them first and ask if they would be interested in helping with your initiative.
- Research members of your school's Faculty Senate and reach out to one or more members to set up a meeting to discuss the importance of adopting the Chicago Statement.
- Check to see if your school's Faculty Senate has a working committee on free expression or is doing free speech-related work through the inclusion and diversity committee. If so, ask them to meet with you to discuss the adoption of a free speech policy statement.

### MEET WITH A CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR

- Reach out to your school's president, provost, dean of students, or president of the Faculty Senate, and ask to meet about the possibility of adopting a free speech statement at your school.
- Come to the meeting prepared to answer questions. Anticipate some concerns that the school's administration may have and be ready to make your best case for why adopting a version of the Chicago Statement is essential for your school.
- Act professionally at the meeting. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than vinegar, and administrators are your allies in this process.
- If you need help preparing for your meeting, reach out to FIRE by emailing [students@thefire.org](mailto:students@thefire.org)! We are happy to schedule a call and brainstorm tactics, or help you develop your arguments.
- For more tips, check out FIRE's resource on [working with administrators](#).



### Sample Email to Administrator

Dear [TITLE] [LAST NAME]:

My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am a member of the class of 20[XX] at [YOUR INSTITUTION]. In order to improve the climate for free expression on campus, I ask that your administration consider adopting a free speech statement in the model of the “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression” at the University of Chicago (better known as the “Chicago Statement”). This eloquent and overarching statement of principles endorses free speech and inquiry, noting that “it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”

If your administration were to adopt such a statement, it would convey to students, faculty members, alumni, and the concerned public that [YOUR INSTITUTION] is a place where one need not fear censorship or punishment for engaging in constitutionally protected expression, and where all members of the campus community will be able to fully participate in the give-and-take of the “marketplace of ideas” on campus. I would be proud to see [YOUR INSTITUTION] take a leading role in the national debate about campus free speech by encouraging robust dialogue and debate among its students and faculty.

I would very much like to meet to discuss adopting a free speech policy statement at [YOUR INSTITUTION]. When are you available to do so?

Sincerely,  
[YOUR NAME]


### Sample Letter to Administrator

Dear [TITLE] [LAST NAME]:

My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am a member of the class of 20[XX] at [YOUR INSTITUTION]. As a student, I have a great interest in improving the state of free expression on our campus. In order to do so, I urge you to adopt a policy statement committing [YOUR INSTITUTION] to upholding the free speech rights and academic freedom of its students and faculty members.

Fortunately, I am able to recommend a model policy statement for your administration to consider, the “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression” at the University of Chicago (better known as the “Chicago Statement”). The Chicago Statement is an eloquent and concise policy statement endorsing free inquiry and discussion, noting that “it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”

The modern university campus is an essential place for discourse; as the Supreme Court of the United States has stated: “For the University, by regulation, to cast disapproval on particular viewpoints of its students risks the suppression of free speech and creative inquiry in one of the vital centers for the



nation’s intellectual life, its college and university campuses.” In order to promote the “marketplace of ideas” on our campus, I hope your administration will consider adopting a principled statement on free expression modeled after the Chicago Statement.

To date, over 40 administrations and faculty bodies have adopted a version of the Chicago Statement. [YOUR INSTITUTION] would similarly benefit from adopting a free speech policy statement, as it would allow the school to foster free and open debate in the tradition of the First Amendment. Of course, I would be proud to see [YOUR INSTITUTION] be a leader on this important issue.

Sincerely,  
[YOUR NAME]



# TIPS AND RESOURCES

[“The Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression” at the University of Chicago](#)

[“Free Expression in Peril,” Geoffrey Stone](#)

[Geoffrey Stone on the University of Chicago’s Statement on Free Expression](#)

[“Universities should endorse free expression now, avoid criticism later”](#)

[“FIRE interviews UNC faculty council committee member about new free speech statement”](#)

[“Increasing calls for adoption of the ‘Chicago Statement’ on free expression”](#)

[“California legislature unanimously urges colleges to adopt free speech policies consistent with the ‘Chicago Statement’”](#)

[Learn more about your rights](#)

[First Amendment on Campus: Public vs. Private Universities](#)

[Adopting the Chicago Statement](#)

[Model free expression resolution](#)

[Chicago Statement endorsement letter to university](#)

[Chicago Statement endorsement letter to alma mater](#)

[Do’s and don’ts of campus activism](#)

[Tips for coalition building](#)

[Tips for working with administrators](#)

[Tips for effective tabling](#)

[Using social media to bolster your activism](#)

[Host a FIRE Speaker on your campus](#)

[Tips for hosting an event on campus](#)

[Checklist for hosting an event](#)

[Placing an op-ed or letter to the editor in your student newspaper](#)

[How to get your op-ed placed in a professional publication](#)

[Press release and media advisory tips](#)



# GRAPHICS AND TOOLS

## DOWNLOAD THE GRAPHICS AND SOCIAL MEDIA KIT.

Use these graphics to promote and enhance your “Commit to Expression” initiatives on campus.

### TWITTER

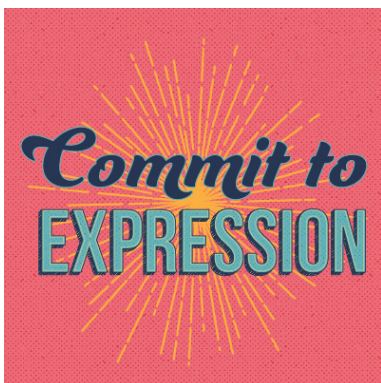


Shareable Graphic 900x450px



Cover Photo 1500x500px

### INSTAGRAM



Profile Photo 400x400px



Graphic 1080x1080px

FACEBOOK



Cover Photo 851x315px



Profile Photo 170x170px

PRINT



Posters 8.5x11in



# THE RULES

This contest is sponsored by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). Contest entrants must be undergraduate or graduate students at colleges or universities in the United States.

The contest will launch on July 20, 2018 and ends at 11:59p.m. (ET) on December 14, 2018 (the “Contest Period”). To be eligible for the prizes you must perform each of the following steps within the Contest Period:

- 1 [Sign up](#) for the Commit to Expression Activism Toolkit.
- 2 Engage in free speech-related activism on campus in furtherance of the “Commit to Expression” campaign.
- 3 [Report your results](#) to FIRE.

Contest entries will be reviewed by a panel of judges with expertise in free speech and campus activism. Initiatives must work toward adopting the Chicago Statement or a version thereof.

In awarding prizes, the following criteria may be taken into account:

- The number of campaign actions completed.
- The impact made on campus and in the larger community.
- Creativity in the execution of the campaign.
- Work with diverse coalitions.

**GOOD LUCK!**

If you have any questions or need advice, don’t hesitate to reach out to the FIRE Student Network staff.

Let us know how your campaign is going along the way! Feel free to keep us in the loop over email and by tagging us in your Twitter and Instagram posts.

