

Title Five: Responsible Speech and Expression

Purpose: The principle of freedom with responsibility is central to Cornell University. Freedom to teach and to learn, to express oneself and to be heard, and freedom to assemble and lawfully protest peacefully are essential to academic freedom and the continuing function of the university as an educational institution. Responsible enjoyment and exercise of these rights means respect for the rights of all. Infringement upon the rights of others or interference with the peaceful and lawful use and enjoyment of university premises, facilities, and programs violates this principle. These time, place, and manner restrictions delineate lawful speech from prohibited forms of expression.

I. Public Speaking Events on Campus

A. Arrangements

1. Any recognized campus organization is free to invite a speaker to address its own membership in a private, closed meeting under ground rules set by the inviting organization.

Commentary. A closed meeting can serve many legitimate purposes, including creation of a more informal atmosphere, maximizing the opportunity of organization members to ask questions, allowing the speaker to talk “off the record,” and ensuring a particular kind of discussion because of advance preparation of the organization’s membership. If a speaker is likely to attract widespread interest among nonmembers, however, the group would often be wise to open the meeting to nonmembers, including those with views contrary to those of the speaker. Nevertheless, the university will not insist that the group do so.

2. If the group chooses to open the event to the campus public, it should seek to arrange adequate space to accommodate the reasonably expected audience.

Commentary. In such a public event the inviting group may also decide whether there is to be a question and answer period, and if so, its length and general format. The speaker or moderator should also be allowed reasonable discretion in requiring questioners to be concise, not to abuse the speaker,