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Freedom of Expression

Tufts University is an educational community that has as its paramount mission the discovery and dissemination of knowledge and the pursuit of the arts through study, teaching, and research. For this community to achieve its mission, all members must have full and equal opportunity to pursue personal and intellectual growth.

Freedom of expression and inquiry are fundamental to the academic enterprise. Without freedom of expression, community members cannot fully share their knowledge or test ideas on the anvil of open debate and criticism. Without freedom of inquiry, community members cannot search for new knowledge or challenge conventional wisdom.

Freedom of expression and inquiry are not absolute. The law, for example, provides that freedom of expression does not include the right to slander the reputation of another, to engage in specified forms of harassment, to threaten or obstruct a speaker who advances unwelcome ideas, or to incite another person to violence. Scholarly inquiry also is limited by federal and state regulation, ethical tenets, and professional standards designed to protect human and animal subjects. In addition, the University seeks to ensure the orderly function of the educational enterprise and to ensure that all members of the community have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the discovery and dissemination of knowledge.

Members of the Tufts community owe one another the basic respect and ethical obligations of human beings engaged in a common endeavor. While not enjoying the force of law, these obligations reflect three basic community values: 1) respect for the freedom of other community members to inquire and express themselves fully; 2) the need to exercise freedom of expression and inquiry in ways that respect the human dignity of others; and 3) the importance of a climate at Tufts that is conducive to learning and in which all community members, regardless of background, are free from behavior that interferes with their ability to study, grow, and attain their full potential. Members of the university community, including academic and administrative leaders, must hold accountable those who do not respect these values.

When community values are not respected, every member of the Tufts community has an obligation to respond. Those who are the target of such speech should not and must not bear the burden of responding alone. An affront against any member of our community is an affront to all of us. It is only by affirming our collective values that we can build a stronger, more cohesive, and more vibrant community where differences are respected and all are made to feel welcome.

It is incumbent upon all members of the Tufts community, and especially the University leadership, to educate the community about the diverse world in which we live and to support and empower members whose rights are violated. In the end, freedom of expression and inquiry is necessary but not sufficient on its own for learning to take place. Achieving our educational mission requires an environment of respect, tolerance, and civil dialogue.

Approved by the Tufts Board of Trustees, November 7, 2009

For more on this policy and the Tufts Board of Trustees, see <http://trustees.tufts.edu/data/expression/>



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