



Frequently Asked Questions

Note: Issues pertaining to freedom of speech and expression can be very complicated and confusing. This website is intended only to provide a brief outline about freedom of speech and expression, and is not meant to serve as legal advice.

If you are a currently registered Northern Illinois University student, you may wish to contact Students' Legal Assistance at (815) 753-1701 to schedule an appointment in order to discuss a particular question or issue. The Office of the Ombudsperson also provides students, faculty and staff with guidance to help solve a variety of university-related issues or conflicts.

Search

- If free speech is guaranteed by the Constitution, why do we need a policy?
- Who developed the policy?
- ❖ I used to be able to avoid the MLK green zone when offensive and hateful speakers were present. Now these speakers can be wherever they want including in front of my residence hall, cafeteria, academic buildings, etc. Why isn't the university working to protect me?

Our new free speech policy stresses that people should be respectful of one another and not descend into what would be termed illegal "hate speech." If that happens, the university is within its rights to take action. However, the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States does not give individuals and groups a Constitutional right not to be offended by something they hear or is said.

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- The policy creates protocols for groups to register to conduct free speech activities. If we believe in truly free speech, why not just let people spontaneously do what they like?
- If a group isn't required to share the content of their protest/rally in advance, how is the counterpoint supposed to be represented?
- Does this apply to students only or will the public have to adhere to this as well?
- What about "politically incorrect" speech? Are people who say hurtful things that might offend some people protected by this policy?
- Who decides what speech/expression is outside the bounds of this policy?

- Have the police been involved and do they understand the rights of students per this freedom of expression policy?
- What will be done to individuals who conduct expressive activities without registering?
- What about trigger warnings?
- Does the policy apply to NIU employees?
- The university is setting up a Bias Action Team to deal with complaints about bias? Isn't it likely that some of that bias will be generated by students exercising their free speech rights? Won't it create a conflict between the Bias Action Team and this new freedom of expression policy?
- Why are classrooms excluded from the policy? Aren't these prime venues for "lively and vigorous debate of issues"?
- Why are supportive spaces exempt?
- Can those who are asked to stop their event appeal that decision?

Freedom of Expression at NIU

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Freedom of Expression 101
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Bias Response Reporting
Other Resources



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