FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

FREEDOM OF SPEECH ON CAMPUS

November 18, 2009

The Core Values of Ferris State University include, among others, Diversity and Learning. Ferris State University "embraces a diversity of ideas, beliefs, and cultures" and "develops critical thinking, emphasizes active learning, and fosters responsibility and the desire for the lifelong pursuit of knowledge". Ferris State University, like all academic institutions, exists for the advancement of knowledge, the pursuit of truth, the development of students, and the promotion of the general well being of society. A critical component for the attainment of these goals is the freedom of expression. Placing restrictions on the exchange of ideas, free inquiry, or controversial discourse diminishes the fundamental principles of higher education.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits the government - including governmental entities such as state universities like Ferris State - from interfering with freedom of speech. The University recognizes the value of this and will safeguard individual's constitutional rights. Although Ferris State University values a tolerant and civil campus environment, we cannot limit speech to only the inoffensive and comfortable. Sometimes we will need to agree to disagree, even when other's opinions anger, sadden, frustrate, hurt, or offend us. As stated in *San Francisco State University v. Reed*, 523 F. Supp. 2d 1005 (2007), "Controversial expression...is the First Amendment's highest duty to protect. By political definition, popular views need no protection. It is the

unpopular notions that are in the greatest peril - and it was primarily to protect their expression that the First Amendment was adopted." Sharing, arguing and dissecting varying opinions and ideas help people learn from one another and aid in the formulation and solidification of our own views.

With that said, it is important to realize that not *all* speech is protected, and incidents of bias, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination that deny or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the educational process are inconsistent with another University value, Ethical Community, and are often illegal and against University policy. Incidents that cause one to feel threatened or unsafe should be reported to University officials and every effort will be made to educate the community and/or hold offenders accountable if applicable. *Ideally,* people will treat each other with respect, dignity, and civility, but the University distinguishes the fine line between reprehensible, and truly prohibited, speech. Such unprotected speech includes defamation, fighting words, and obscenity (see The Code of Student Community Standards for more information).

Ferris State University strives to be a welcoming, caring, and inclusive community where the tenet of diversity (of people *and* ideas) is respected and valued. Open communication and rigorous debate are woven into the fabric of teaching and learning. We are committed to providing the opportunity for everyone to exercise their constitutional freedoms, learn in a safe environment, and critically consider important, albeit sometimes difficult, issues.

Sexual Misconduct Task Force Report

Student Affairs Administrati Council

Student Affairs Awards

Title IX Compliance

Vice President for Student Affairs

POLICIES

Policies

Code of Student Community Standards

Employee and Student Dignity Policy

University Complaint Policy

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