

Speech and Expression Policy

[Preamble](#)

[I. General Policy](#)

[II. Guidelines](#)

[III. Marketing Guidelines](#)

[IV. Speech and Expression Committee](#)

[V. Violations of the Speech and Expression Policy](#)

[VI. Speech and Expression Committee Opinions](#)

[PREAMBLE](#)

In January 1989, the following guidelines on speech and expression for the Main Campus of Georgetown University were implemented. They were developed by the Committee on Speech and Expression and presented to the University community after widespread consultation with faculty, students and administrators. The Committee on Speech and Expression, composed of four faculty members and four undergraduate students, is a standing committee that advises the Vice President for Student Affairs on matters relating to speech and expression. The Vice President for Student Affairs is responsible for administering these guidelines.

The policy guiding speech and expression is intended to ensure the "untrammelled expression of ideas and information." Reverend James Walsh, S.J., wrote the following statement to provide an appropriate context for understanding the policy:

“The following policy on free speech and expression derives from a certain understanding of what a university is and of what Georgetown University is. I will attempt to articulate that understanding.

1. The nature of a university. A university is many things but central to its being is discourse, discussion, debate: the untrammelled expression of ideas and information. This discourse is carried on communally: we all speak and we all listen. Ideally, discourse is open and candid and also ideally-is characterized by courtesy, mutual reverence and even charity.
2. The university teaches by being what it is. What the university takes seriously as an institution imparts (to its students especially but not exclusively) important lessons. The fundamental lesson it imparts-just by being what it is-has to do with the nature of the intellectual life. Rigor of thought and care in research; the willingness to address any question whatever; the habit of self-critical awareness of one's own biases and presupposition; reverence for fellow members of the university community and openness to their ideas, which is reductively a concern for the truth itself-the list could be prolonged. These habits of mind and attitude have a powerfully shaping influence on all members of the academic community. A university that sends contrary "signals" to any of its

members (as, obviously, by tolerating plagiarism, violence, intellectual shoddiness, or any sort of special pleading in the interest of ideology or vested interest) betrays its mission.

3. "Free speech" is central to the life of the university. The category "free speech" suggests another realm of life and argument, that of American constitutional law. Indeed, members of a university community exercise "dual citizenship": we are academics and we are Americans. The rights and obligations that flow from our participation in each of the two orders--academic and constitutional--are not reducible to those of either one, nor superceded by one or the other, but neither are they in conflict. At the same time, the body of legal principles elaborated from the First Amendment is usefully applied to particular problems. For example, "free speech", in the constitutional sense, may be limited by, and only by, reasonable and non discriminatory considerations of "time, place and manner." These legal categories are most helpful in resolving the problem of how to reconcile the absolute openness of expression proper to a university with other considerations: numbers of people, multiplicity of activities, scheduling, space available and so on. The long and short of the matter is that "time, place and manner" are the only norms allowable in governing the expression of ideas and sharing of information that is the very life of the university.

4. More is better. Discourse is central to the life of the university. To forbid or limit discourse contradicts everything the university stands for. This conviction proceeds from several assumptions. Besides those sketched above, there is the assumption that the exchange of ideas will lead to clarity, mutual understanding, the tempering of harsh and extreme positions, the softening of hardened positions and ultimately the attainment of truth. Some ideas, simply by being expressed, sink without a trace; others cry out for the intervention of reflection, contrary evidence, probing questions. None of that happens when one cuts off discourse. John Henry Newman's formulation applies here: "flagrant evils cure themselves by being flagrant." The remedy for silly or extreme or offensive ideas is not less free speech but more.

5. The tradition of Georgetown University demands that we live up to these ideals. In this whole question, matters of history and of convictions central to the Catholic and Jesuit tradition come into play. The historical precedent of the medieval Catholic university, with its lively practice of the "disputation," and its role in the formulation, clarification and development of doctrine, the Catholic teaching that between faith and reason there can be no fundamental conflict, the Catholic teaching about the autonomy of reason, certain Jesuit principles about putting the most favorable construction on your neighbor's argument and especially about reverence for conscience; the vision of our founder, John Carroll, of a "...general and equal toleration, . . . giving a free circulation to fair argument," and of an Academy that would be the "first in character & merit in America"-these and many other fundamentals of the tradition in which Georgetown stands prohibit any limitation upon discourse. Georgetown's identification with the Catholic and Jesuit tradition, far from limiting or compromising the ideal of free discourse, requires that we live up to that ideal.

6. Violation of these principles, by whatever parties, must have consequences. This is a corollary of the principles themselves and necessary to vindicate the nature of the University itself. The offenses envisioned in the following policy amount to cutting off discourse. Making it impossible for others to speak or be heard or seen, or in any way obstructing the free exchange of ideas, is an attack on the core principles the University lives by and may not be tolerated."

-- Rev. James Walsh, S.J., Department of Theology

I. GENERAL POLICY

As an institution of higher education, one specifically committed to the Catholic and Jesuit tradition, Georgetown University is committed to free and open inquiry, deliberation and debate in all matters, and the untrammelled verbal and nonverbal expression of ideas. It is Georgetown University's policy to provide all members of the University community, including faculty, students, and staff, the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn.

The ideas of different members of the University community will often and naturally conflict. It is not the proper role of a University to insulate individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Deliberation or debate may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or ill conceived.

It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to judge the value of ideas, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting those arguments and ideas that they oppose. Fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage with each other in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the University's educational mission.

The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. The University prohibits expression that violates the law, falsely defames a specific individual, constitutes a genuine threat, violates the [University's Harassment Policy](https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/cfbogdgoq1jm4yu62yjc) (<https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/cfbogdgoq1jm4yu62yjc>), or unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests. In addition, the University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the institution. Finally, to the extent that appointment letters, confidentiality agreements or policies, professional conduct policies, or HR policies regulate conduct that may include speech and expression, they are not superseded by this policy. But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is vitally important that these exceptions not be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University's commitment to a free and open discussion of ideas.

As a corollary to the University's commitment to protect and promote free expression, members of the University community must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression. Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed by other members of the community, or by individuals who are invited to campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe. To this end, the University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of deliberation and debate, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.

In 1990 Ernest Boyer, President of Carnegie Foundation wrote, "[A] university is an open, honest community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected, and where civility is powerfully affirmed." Because it is essential to free and open inquiry, deliberation, and debate, all

members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining civil and respectful discourse. But concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off the discussion of ideas, no matter how offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

II. GUIDELINES

The following guidelines implement the foregoing propositions:

A. Event Sponsorship

An individual member or group of members of the academic community may invite any person to address the community. For purposes of this document, an event is any public meeting organized by such an individual or group primarily for the dissemination or exchange of ideas. Events may be sponsored by individual students, groups of students, or student organizations with access to University benefits. "Public meeting" shall not be construed to include formal academic convocations, regularly scheduled classes, or regular business meetings of University organizations. Student organizations with access to University benefits may engage in co-sponsorships with any group, regardless of Access to Benefits status of the partner group. Guidelines on co-sponsorship are available on the Center for Student Engagement website. Student organizations that co-sponsor an event with any other group will not be sanctioned on that basis.

B. Events

Classrooms are places of dialogue and free exchange for the Georgetown University community. The University will accommodate equally all students and student groups who wish to schedule an event or meeting exclusively for the Georgetown community in a classroom space, subject to availability. Restrictions shall not be placed on individual's reserving classrooms for the purpose of limiting, managing or controlling the content of the gathering. Individuals must comply with the [Classroom Use Policy \(http://registrar.georgetown.edu/schedules/event-scheduling/classroom-usage/\)](http://registrar.georgetown.edu/schedules/event-scheduling/classroom-usage/) and any other relevant university policies. The individual reserving the classroom is responsible for ensuring compliance with all relevant policies. Failure to comply with the [Classroom Use Policy \(http://registrar.georgetown.edu/schedules/event-scheduling/classroom-usage/\)](http://registrar.georgetown.edu/schedules/event-scheduling/classroom-usage/) or other relevant policies may result in an individual's or organization's loss of ability to reserve classrooms in the future. Classrooms are reserved through the Office of the Registrar. This policy does not pertain to commercial activities or gatherings or use of classrooms; commercial activity – the conducting of any business for exchange of goods and services for money or personal financial gain – is not permitted in Georgetown University classrooms. This policy does not pertain to external organizations.

Requests to host external groups or speakers in university classrooms are subject to review and consideration under the [Classroom Use Policy \(http://registrar.georgetown.edu/schedules/event-scheduling/classroom-usage/\)](http://registrar.georgetown.edu/schedules/event-scheduling/classroom-usage/) and the [Access to Benefits \(https://studentaffairs.georgetown.edu/policies/student-organizations/access-to-benefits\)](https://studentaffairs.georgetown.edu/policies/student-organizations/access-to-benefits) policy and must be approved. External groups are not permitted to use university classrooms without sponsorship by a university department or organization with access to benefits, or a contract defining the terms of use.

Physical space to conduct dialogue is a critical component of free speech. Individual students who seek to host events to promote dialogue or discussion can attend training hosted by the Center for Student Engagement to clarify and affirm their understanding of policies related to classroom use for free speech purposes. Students who attend training will have access to the same expedited classroom reservation process as student organizations with access to University benefits for internal group meetings only.

The individual or group hosting such an event must reserve the place where it will occur, in accordance with registration requirements. However, certain areas of campus shall be considered “public squares” and shall be available, without prior arrangement, for individuals and groups during daylight hours for the purpose of exchanging ideas. These areas include: Red Square (the plaza adjacent to ICC), the east area of Regents Lawn between Regents Hall and Tondorff Road, Leavey Lobby, and a portion of the entry foyer in Healey Family Student Center. Because of the proximity of outdoor public square areas like Red Square to classrooms, sound amplification in conjunction with any presentation is prohibited during weekday business hours (Monday through Friday, 9am – 5pm) Indoor public square areas like Leavey Lobby and the Healey Family Student Center are subject to restrictions in the number of tables permitted due to egress and safety concerns. Tabling occupancy limits shall be available from the office managing the designated space.

C. Costs

An individual, organization, or department hosting an event is responsible for all costs associated with the event, including security if such is deemed necessary by the University administration). No University subsidy will be available unless by prior arrangement. A group hosting an event is responsible for all costs associated with the event. However, excessive security costs shall not be construed as a disincentive to host an event of a controversial nature, so groups encountering budget limitations should reach out to the Center for Student Engagement as early as possible to plan for event costs accordingly.

In rare cases, groups may request a waiver of security costs. For more information, contact the Center for Student Engagement at getinvolved@georgetown.edu.

D. Access to Events

Any event that receives financial support or other benefits of any kind from the University must be open to members of the academic community. If seating is expected to be limited, an equitable means of ticket distribution must be approved by the appropriate campus office. Such events ordinarily shall allow for a period of questions from the audience. All event hosts should incorporate a method to allow event attendees to request reasonable accommodations in order to make the event accessible. This should be included as a statement of accommodation request in all material marketing and advertising an event. The notification should read:

“Accommodation requests related to a disability should be made by [specific date] to [sponsoring department contact person, phone number and email address]. A good faith effort will be made to fulfill requests made after [date].”

E. Protest of Events

An individual or group wishing to protest at an event may do so as long as any speaker's right to free speech and the audience's right to see and to hear a speaker are not violated. Student organizations and university departments are required to plan for the possibility of protests while organizing their events. The sponsoring group or department should prepare an area adjacent to the location of their event for protests, even if that means reserving an outdoor or lobby space. The Center for Student Engagement will train clubs and organizations accordingly and assist with such reservations. This does not mean protests are limited to such areas alone.

Protesting in a public forum or in the media are expressions of free speech, not university benefits extended to student organizations. Expressive activities planned and executed with the intention of protesting an event, policy or other concept can take place in all campus locations regardless of whether

the space has been reserved for that purpose, as long as the actions do not violate other university policies, disrupt university business, or curtail the free speech rights of others.

F. Entrance into University Buildings by Protestors

Protestors who are members of the university community will be allowed entrance into any university building unless they are disturbing university activities such as class or office work. They will be able to stay in the building until the building is closed for the day, or until the office or area closes for business that day. Entrance into the building does not mean entrance into any or all offices. The departments of Student Affairs, the Registrar, Protocol and Events, and Public Safety will confer to determine whether a protest may continue.

Protestors may not enter a building if that space has been secured for a speech to be given in that building. For example, the Healy lobby is often used for entrance to speeches in Gaston Hall. In that case, the protestors must remain outside the building in a space previously designated by the Center for Student Engagement, the Office of Campus Activity Facilities, the Department of Public Safety and the Office of Protocol and Events. This policy applies to any buildings where a major event or speaker is hosted.

G. Literature and Publicity

Georgetown University encourages the community to promote events and activities responsibly through a full range of available media. Certain information and communication channels are open to any individual member of the university community, such as flyering on designated bulletin boards, chalking messages in Red Square, tabling in public square areas, purchasing or requesting advertising in campus media, and using any variety of public social media platforms. Certain information and marketing channels are deemed official university resources and are available only to organizations with Access to Benefits or University departments. These channels include reserved tables in designated campus locations, university broadcast messages, electronic message and display system, and banners in designated banner areas.

Communication and publicity should be conducted in a manner that is respectful of others' rights to share information and recognizes one's part in the University community. The foremost issue in this policy is the safety and security of the University community and visitors. Georgetown also strives to be environmentally responsible. Many of the restrictions exist to ensure safety and respect for all.

III. MARKETING GUIDELINES

A. Interior Flyers

Only members of the Georgetown University academic community may hang posters or distribute handbills and pamphlets. No student organization other than one granted access to University benefits may use Georgetown in its name, or for any other reason except to identify the location of an event.

Interior bulletin boards exist in the following Main Campus locations: Leavey Center, Healey Family Student Center, Intercultural Center, Hariri, Regents Hall, Reiss Science Building, Walsh, New North, and Old North. Some residential areas also provide bulletin boards for general announcements.

All posters and flyers placed on campus inside buildings must be in compliance with the following guidelines:

1. All materials to be posted on campus may be placed only on unenclosed public bulletin boards or kiosks. People may place only one flyer/poster per bulletin board to allow for ease of reading and to give others equal opportunity to post. Flyers/posters should never be hung where they cover up any previously posted current materials. Departmental bulletin boards are not intended for public announcements and may be used only by the appropriate department or school.
2. Posting materials in Residential community spaces is governed by the Residential Living Posting Policy. Some bulletin boards in residential spaces are for common use, but others are for official use by university staff. Doors to residential rooms or apartments are considered the responsibility of the resident; students may use this space to post flyers or materials intended to express personal views.
3. Due to the distinct nature of some locations, specific requirements, guidelines or limitations are posted at those sites.
4. If posting in inappropriate locations results in damage to University property, restitution will be required from the responsible party.
5. Due to fire and safety codes it is prohibited to post flyers in stairwells, on doors, and on stair rails.

B. Exterior (Outdoor) Flyers and Marketing

1. Flyers and posters may be posted at outdoor locations up to one week before an event. The flyers and posters should be removed immediately following the event.
2. Materials may be posted only on walls (not windows and doors) and only in designated areas: Red Square (not on walls adjacent to the ICC main entrance), Darnall, New South, Alumni Square, and at the arches of Henle. Flyers and posters should be posted using only masking tape.
3. Lampposts: Flyers/posters may be placed only within specially defined and designed places on the posts and may not be taped to the lampposts.
4. Flyers may not be posted on trees, benches, recycling or trash containers, on Healy Gates (or the Gatehouses), or on the pavement (including all sidewalks, streets, Red Square, etc.).
5. Removal of flyers: Individuals must remove their flyers/posters following an event. Grounds staff will remove all exterior flyers/posters every Monday before 10 a.m.

C. Chalking

Chalking is permitted on the brick pavers of Red Square. The chalk must be water-soluble "sidewalk" chalk, which wears away with water or foot traffic. Chalking on the exterior walls of any campus building (academic, administrative or residential) is prohibited. If chalking in inappropriate locations or with the wrong type of material results in damage to University property, restitution will be required from the responsible party. A set of photos documenting permissible places to chalk is available on the Center for Student Engagement Hoyalink page.

D. Banners

Banner space exists on the Leavey Center (3 banners) and at Red Square (2 banners). Banner space may be reserved by the week through the Office of Campus Activity Facilities (1507 Leavey). Banners may only be hung in approved locations. An exception will be made for banners hung outside of the standard banner area in Red Square for the purpose of student government elections.

E. Campus Media

All campus media outlets granted access to benefits through the Media Board may offer opportunities for publicity and promotion including paid and classified advertising, public service announcements,

calendar notices and special interest pieces.

All campus media groups fall within the free speech protections offered by the Speech and Expression Policy. Georgetown University does not engage in any pre-production editorial review of any campus media outlet. As publisher of campus media organizations, Georgetown reserves the right to restrict paid advertising in campus media, in accordance with the Advertising Policy for Campus Media.

F. Technology

Technology offers many underutilized alternatives for communication and publicity. Technology is usually free and reaches a broad audience.

G. Email

Groups or individuals may maintain email distribution lists for the purpose of promoting events. Student organization email distribution lists should include a mechanism for individuals to opt out of distribution. Student organizations with access to University benefits can use official Broadcast Email channels in accordance with the [Broadcast Email policy](https://hovalink.georgetown.edu/organization/CenterforStudentEngagement/availableforms) (<https://hovalink.georgetown.edu/organization/CenterforStudentEngagement/availableforms>).

H. Tabling

Tabling is a method of expressing a viewpoint by setting up a table or other physical structure such as a sign or pop-up tent in a public space to distribute or display materials. Tabling activities must comply with all other relevant university policies, for example prohibitions on disrupting classes or using amplified sound during business hours. Tabling is permitted on campus in the following areas:

1. Public squares described in this policy under “Events.” Public squares include Red Square, Leavey Lobby, Regents Lawn and the Healey Family Student Center with noted limitations for egress and safety.
2. In front of Lauinger Library, from the steps to the edge of Healy Hall provided that ample room is allowed for egress and safe passage along this pedestrian corridor.
3. Alumni Square Courtyard, provided that no reservations have been made through the Office of Campus Activities or the Alumni Square residential community for an event in this space.
4. Patio area at the base of the steps between Henle Village and Darnall Hall.

In residential areas, specifically the locations noted in points 3 and 4 above, the following conditions apply:

- a.) Tabling may only occur between the hours of 9:00am and 10:00pm.
- b.) No more than 3 tables are permitted in these areas at one time and each must be at least 15 ft. from residential entrances.
- c.) Tables may not compromise the egress or safe passage of students in and out of the buildings or through campus.
- d.) University officials such as GUPD and Community Directors have the right to restrict tabling in a residential area if students raise concerns about noise or access to buildings.
- e.) Tabling may not occur in a reservable residential outdoor space when reservations have been made for an event.

University officials from the Office of Residential Living, the Office of Campus Activity Facilities, the Center for Student Engagement, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Georgetown University Police Department monitor tabling in campus areas and note conflicts with scheduled events in reservable spaces. Individuals or groups who do not comply with university directives to end tabling so scheduled events may proceed will be subject to disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct.

The Tabling Maps are located in the PDF below.

I. HANDBILLS, PAMPHLETS, FLYERS AND QUARTER-SHEETS

Handbills, pamphlets, flyers and quarter-sheets may be distributed to any location on campus except classrooms or offices in use. When handbill distribution is associated with a particular event, whether indoor or outdoor, the location of indoor handbill distribution may be restricted on occasion to preserve safety and security at events and convocation, but distribution in these cases may not be wholly prevented or unnecessarily restricted.

This policy and information is designed to assist individuals and groups in the Georgetown University community in effectively sharing information with the rest of campus in respectful and creative ways.

IV. SPEECH AND EXPRESSION COMMITTEE

The Vice President for Student Affairs has the responsibility for administering these guidelines. Only in extreme cases of violation of these guidelines can the Vice President prohibit speech and expression before it occurs. In administering these guidelines, the Vice-President shall be advised by a Committee on Speech and Expression, composed of four undergraduate students, one graduate student, appropriate staff from Student Affairs, and four faculty or academic administrators. The Vice President and the Committee may consider and implement revisions and improvements to these guidelines in a manner consistent with the ideals articulated at the beginning of this document. Committee members will also hear appeals regarding the enforcement of this policy.

A. STUDENT APPOINTMENTS

Three undergraduate representatives will be appointed by GUSA for single academic-year appointments through a campus-wide application process, and one by Student Affairs. One graduate student will also serve on the committee, to be appointed by the Graduate Student Organization. Four faculty members or academic administrators will be appointed through existing procedures to renewable, two-year terms.

B. CORRESPONDENCE

Concerns related to free speech and expression can be reported to the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs by emailing speechandexpression@georgetown.edu. A response will be made within two business days of receiving the email. The committee, in consultation with the Vice President for Student Affairs, will review complaints and refer incidents and individuals to appropriate offices for follow up and response. The committee may also issue opinions or provide recommendations in the interest of upholding these principles and ensuring university practices are aligned with this policy.

C. TRAINING

Training on the management of speech and expression issues for university departments, student organizations and other relevant groups hosting events will be available by the Center for Student Engagement in collaboration with other departments on campus. Groups concerned about speech and expression issues related to an event, protest or other matter are encouraged to email getinvolved@georgetown.edu.

V. VIOLATIONS OF THE SPEECH AND EXPRESSION POLICY

Violations of the policy and/or guidelines by students will be handled through the disciplinary system administered through the Office of Student Conduct. It is a violation of this policy to curtail the free speech rights of others. Actions that violate this policy include disrupting events to prohibit other students from hearing the views of an invited speaker, removing flyers or other materials from individual student's residence hall doors, or otherwise limiting another's ability to express a view or perspective.

Nothing within this policy shall be construed to confer rights on any person not a part of the academic community as defined herein.

VI. Speech and Expression Committee Opinions

The Speech and Expression Committee hears complaints from members of the Georgetown community regarding issues of free speech and expression. The Committee issues opinions regarding these complaints which may serve to illuminate the nature of the issues at stake with these concerns, and offer guidance for practical follow up and policy clarification.

Division of Student Affairs

530 Leavey Center
37th and O Streets, N.W.,
Washington D.C. 20057
Phone: [\(202\) 687-4056](tel:(202)687-4056)

Fax: (202) 687.6255