

University of Iowa Faculty Senate Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom

The University of Iowa is fully committed to freedom of expression for all members of the academic community (faculty, students, and staff) and visitors to the campus. That commitment underlies and informs the many other policies and procedures (several linked below) that touch on speech and behavior on The University of Iowa campus.

Freedom of expression is not only mandated by the United States Constitution and laws, but treasured as essential to the educational mission. The expression and consideration of differing opinions promote intellectual development, and advance cultural and intellectual inclusiveness. Students' exposure to the exchange of strongly held views is part of the educational process, a part that is necessary to equip them to become leaders in a diverse and sometimes divided society.

History teaches that speech that sparks strong disagreement or disapprobation is most in need of protection. Since open discourse is an indispensable element of teaching and learning, those who come to the university must be prepared to have their beliefs and expectations challenged, sometimes in ways they find offensive. Yet, to achieve these goals, free expression must be protected in a content-neutral manner, and must be the right of everyone.

The University of Iowa is similarly committed to academic freedom. If an institution of higher education is to function effectively, all faculty members, research professionals, and students must enjoy freedom of inquiry in research and creative endeavors, and must be free to teach and learn without fear that new or unpopular ideas will be stifled, or divergent viewpoints suppressed. In university-connected events both inside and outside the classroom or laboratory, members of our community must be free to challenge and question accepted wisdom.

In order to render these commitments a living reality, The University of Iowa must do its utmost to protect the expression of opposing ideas. The university should strive to avoid, not only suppression of unpopular ideas, but also the intimidation and even violence that expression of opposing views sometimes generates.

Even free expression and academic freedom have limits. For example, threats of violence, incitement to violence, severe and pervasive harassment, and expression that places persons and property in imminent danger are not protected and may subject violators to discipline, prosecution, or exclusion from the campus. The university may impose reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions on expressive activities. With regard to academic freedom, all those who teach shall avoid importing into the classroom controversial material that has no relation to course content. Sections of the University of Iowa Operations Manual that relate to these issues include: I.2.1, II.4, II.10, II.14, III.10.1a, III.15, III.16, III.32, IV.1.1, V.16, V.28, V.35, V.37, V.38, V.45¹. The university shall enforce these rules and policies with a view towards ensuring a secure environment, while protecting expressive rights and academic freedom. It is important that all rules and policies be applied in a content-neutral manner,

¹ Referenced Operations Manual Sections: I.2.1 Purpose and Mission; II.4 Sexual harassment; II.10 Violence; II.14 Anti-harassment; III.10.1a Tenure and non-tenure appointments; III.15 Professional ethics and academic responsibility; III.16 Ethics and responsibilities for UI staff; III.32 Visitors in the workplace; IV.1.1 Student rules and regulations; V.16 Critical incident management plan; V.28 Campus speakers and programs; V.35 Conditions of use of university facilities; V.37 Use of the Pentacrest; V.38 Use of campus outdoor areas other than the Pentacrest; V.45 Video surveillance.

University of Iowa Faculty Senate Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom

and that the mere possibility of negative reaction not be used as an excuse to suppress expressive activities or impose oppressive prior restraints on speech.

It would be naïve not to anticipate that some ideas expressed on this campus and even in some academic settings, such as classrooms and laboratories, will be seen as loathsome by many members of our community and the public more generally. Yet permitting the expression of such ideas is the predictable price of the freedoms we cherish. Our task is to create a space where free expression inside and outside the classroom may occur among all members of our diverse community.