

Public Forum Policy

Authority: Student Affairs

Date Enacted or Revised: January 2009; Revised August 2015; September 12, 2018; March 18, 2022

Administrative Authority

The Vice President for Student Affairs is the administrative officer charged by the University president with oversight of the University's public forum policy. Contact the Office of Student Services in the New Ranch, Office 102, located at 4300 Jefferson Davis Drive, or for more information regarding use of public forum areas by individuals and groups not affiliated with the University.

Purpose

As a publicly supported institution within the University of Louisiana System, McNeese State University values the open exchange of ideas on campus and facilities and embraces the free and open exchange of ideas in the context of a diverse community. The University also recognizes its responsibility to maintain focus on its primary educational objectives. As such, the University encourages students, faculty, and staff to engage in vigorous and collegial debate and discussion within the context of classroom instruction, informal interactions with others, and in social interactions throughout the campus.

University students and employees may freely communicate their ideas through the exchange of verbal and written communications, processes and productions, and formal and informal gatherings on the campus at any time and are encouraged to do so in a manner that does not interfere with the University's capacity to administer its core values of teaching and learning, research, public service, and community engagement.

It is not the role of McNeese to shield individuals from speech protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States and Article 1, Section 7 of the Constitution of Louisiana, and other applicable laws including without limitation the Louisiana Public Access to Information Act. Speech that is found unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.

Students and faculty have the freedom to discuss any topic that presents itself, as provided under the First Amendment of the United States of America and Article 1, Section 7 of the Constitution of Louisiana and other applicable laws pertaining to the time, place, and manner of expression that are consistent with the part and are necessary to achieve a significant institutional purpose. The University shall be published and provide ample alternative means of expression.

Any person lawfully present on-campus may protest or demonstrate at McNeese. Protests and demonstrations that infringe on the constitutional rights of others to engage in or listen to expressive activity by creating a substantial and material disruption of the institution or to someone's expressive activity shall not be permitted.

Policy

Distribution of Literature

The University recognizes the right of individuals and groups to distribute literature regarding social, cultural, political, or ideological issues on the campus. To assure distribution activities do not disrupt normal campus processes and operations, the following regulations regarding time, place, and manner of such distribution will apply to individuals and groups not affiliated with the University:

- **Distribution Zones:** The following locations shall be deemed distribution zones:
 - **Zone A**
 - **Zone B**
- **Calendar:** Individuals or groups may distribute literature on campus three times per year (once each fall, spring, and summer) in the designated zone(s) only.
- **Length:** Distribution of literature may occur for up to four hours on three consecutive business days for each distribution period. Distribution shall be deemed to have begun at the time and date indicated on the application.

Political Campaigns

The University recognizes the right of candidates for public office and their official and unofficial spokespersons to engage in political campaign activities on campus. To assure campaign activities do not disrupt normal campus processes and operations, the following regulations regarding time, place, and manner of such activities will apply to individuals and groups not affiliated with the University:

- **Campaign Zones:** The following locations shall be deemed campaign zones:
 - **Zone A**
 - **Zone B**
 - **Zone C**
 - **Zone D**
- **Calendar:** Individuals may campaign on campus once per month in the 90-day period leading up to a scheduled election only.
- **Length:** Campaign activities may occur for up to two hours on three consecutive business days. The campaign activity shall begin at the time and date indicated on the application.
- **Political Signs:** Political signs may not be mounted, posted, or affixed anywhere on University property in order to ensure safety and ethics are upheld at all times.
- **Candidate Speeches:** Candidates for public office, upon approval by the vice president for student affairs, may offer campaign speeches in a common area of the Student Union Annex. Such speeches are limited to 30 minutes and may occur only once per day on the date approved. All speeches must be approved.
- **Public Appearances by Candidates for Statewide Office:** Statewide, elected officials may participate in public activities on campus, including athletic events, by request to and upon approval of the University president and as coordinated through the athletics director. The director respectfully asks that such requests be made only in non-election years.

disturbance. Public speech occurring in contexts other than normal traversing of public sidewalks and streets and groups not affiliated with the University is subject to the following regulations regarding time, place, and manner.

- **Public Speech Zones:** The following locations shall be deemed public speech zones:
 - **Zone A**
 - **Zone B**
- **Calendar:** Individuals may speak on campus once per week in the assigned public speech zones.
- **Length:** Speeches may last for up to two hours. The speeches shall be deemed to have begun at the time and date indicated on the application.

General Operating Procedures

Application and Approval

Application to utilize public forum areas must be received and approved at least 72 hours in advance (three business days, excluding holidays, and closures) through the dean of student services to ensure adequate review. Persons or groups wishing to utilize public forum areas are strongly urged to make application seven to ten days prior to the desired event. The application must occur through the Office of Student Services and must contain the date and starting time of the proposed activity, contact information (address, telephone number, email address, etc.) of the reserving party, identification of the activity (speech, public demonstration, political campaign, literature distribution), and signature of the person making application. Requests for use of public forum areas if the event is deemed to require substantial planning and preparation beyond 72 hours will be accomplished within 72 hours in light of normal daily operations of the campus. Such determinations will be made in accordance with viewpoint-neutral guidelines.

However, the University recognizes that such advance arrangements are not always possible. Students may use public forum areas of the campus for spontaneous protests, demonstrations, and similar activity, so long as such use does not necessitate extensive planning on the part of the University, and the activity attracts fewer than 100 attendees.

Cancellations

Cancellation of reservations of public forum areas must occur in advance of the event start time. Events not properly cancelled will have occurred at the date and time indicated on the original application.

Concurrent Events

Due to the relatively small and intimate nature of the campus, it is not unusual for multiple events to occur in close proximity, particularly in central areas such as the campus Quadrangle, Student Union complex, and the athletics complex. The University encourages all areas do so with the understanding that previously scheduled events and activities of the University may be ongoing. Public forum zones even during periods when such areas are reserved for use by individuals and groups not affiliated with the University.

Literature Distribution

Literature (flyers, brochures, information sheets, push cards) may be made available to interested persons during the public forum. The distribution of literature onto observers or passersby or affixing literature to automobiles, trees, grounds, fixtures, or other stationary objects constitute a violation of University regulations and will result in cessation of the public forum activity by appropriate University officials.

Maintenance and Preservation of the Physical Environment

Persons utilizing the public forum will conduct their activities in a manner that does not deface, litter, or otherwise damage the physical environment of the campus. Individuals and groups responsible for littering, vandalizing, defacing, or otherwise damaging the physical environment are subject to restitution and criminal prosecution.

Official University Events

Events sponsored by the University and auxiliary groups officially recognized by the University may occasionally require the use of public forum areas temporarily unavailable for use by persons and groups unaffiliated with the University. In circumstances where the public forum area is reserved in advance of the University's need for such space, the University may request the reserving party consent to the use of the public forum area mutually agreeable to the reserving party and the University. In such cases where a mutually agreeable alternative is not available, the reserving party's use of the public forum area will be honored.

Prohibited Activities

Activities that incite illegal conduct and/or disrupt University operations are strictly prohibited at all times.

Penalties for Non-Compliance with University Regulations

Individuals and groups not affiliated with the University are subject to civil law as well as University regulations regarding the use of the public forum by employees and students. Individuals and groups not complying with University regulations regarding use of the public forum at the University, are subject to immediate removal from the campus, may be barred from future access to the campus, and may be subject to criminal acts, where appropriate.

Physical Descriptions of Zones

- **Zone A:** The grassy lawn area surrounded by pavement on all sides, located in the southeast section of the Quad between the east-west sidewalk, east of center, of the Quad. This area consists of approximately 14,000 square feet and has, as its centerpiece, a multipurpose stage and performance structure that is included as a part of the zone available for public forum use.
- **Zone B:** The grassy lawn area, surrounded by pavement or building walls on all sides, located south of the Holbrook Student Center, Office of University Marketing and Licensing and Beauregard Drive. This area consists of approximately 3,000 square feet.
- **Zone C:** The grassy area outside of the football stadium complex bordered by pavement (Blue & Gold Drive, East Stadium Drive, and Cowboy Drive). This area exceeds 15,000 square feet. This area does not include paved pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfares or other paved areas of the stadium.

- Whether the event is limited to members of the campus community or is open to the public;
- The proposed location of the event;
- The anticipated number of attendees;
- The time of day that the event is taking place;
- The date and day of the week of the event;
- The proximity of the event to other activities or locations that may interfere, obstruct, or lessen the effectiveness of the security measures;
- The resources necessary to secure the event;
- The anticipated weather conditions;
- The anticipated duration of the event; and
- Any similar considerations relevant to the assessment of security needs.

Contact University Police at (337) 475-5711 for general information regarding rates and terms for event security.

Unauthorized Meetings

Individuals or groups not affiliated with the University who, whether as active participants or as spectators, participate in activities that create a substantial and material disruption, cause destruction of University property or the personal property of others, or require removal, arrest, prosecution, and restitution and may face University disciplinary proceedings, if applicable.

Application for Use of Public Forum

Contact the Dean of Student Services in the Office of Student Services to obtain a copy of this application:

New Ranch, Office 102

4300 Jefferson Davis Drive

PO Box 92535

(337) 475-5609

Communication

This policy is distributed via the University Policies webpage.