

SMU Faculty Senate Resolution on Free and Civil Speech

Approved 5 February 2020

Whereas at Southern Methodist University “we embrace freedom of ideas and expression” (“Core Values”), and “seek knowledge and understanding through open, energetic inquiry and creative freedom. We support one another with hard questions and sincere encouragement. Because we seek truth, we encourage free expression of ideas, accept challenges to our assumptions, and treat those whom we question as colleagues sharing a common purpose” (University Policy Manual 1.2.1.a); and

Whereas the free expression and exchange of ideas is an essential and foundational component of both democracy and rational inquiry; and

Whereas the mission of a university as well as rational deliberation itself thus require “the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn,” and universities therefore have “a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it” (Chicago Statement); and

Whereas “The pursuit of knowledge and the maintenance of a free and democratic society require the cultivation and practice of the virtues of intellectual humility, openness of mind, and, above all, love of truth. These virtues will manifest themselves and be strengthened by one’s willingness to listen attentively and respectfully to intelligent people who challenge one’s beliefs and who represent causes one disagrees with and points of view one does not share” (George & West); and

Whereas “Our willingness to listen to and respectfully engage those with whom we disagree (especially about matters of profound importance) contributes vitally to the maintenance of a milieu in which people feel free to speak their minds, consider unpopular positions, and explore lines of argument that may undercut established ways of thinking. Such an ethos protects us against dogmatism and groupthink, both of which are toxic to the health of academic communities and to the functioning of democracies” (George & West); and

Whereas, for a variety of social, technological, and political reasons, the ability of Americans to enact these vital activities has been significantly eroded, even on college campuses, to the detriment of both learning and the public good; and

Whereas Southern Methodist University is committed to cultivating its students’ “personal growth, intellectual and social engagement, understanding of personal responsibility, respect for others, and leadership opportunities” (2018-19 Progress Report on the SMU Strategic Plan, Goal 4, Objective 2); and

Whereas “inquiry and expression that carefully consider the perspectives of others are learned skills that require sustained effort and practice” (Colgate Report);

Be it resolved that

- The Faculty Senate of Southern Methodist University endorses the principles of the [Chicago Statement](#) on free speech and inquiry, and affirms the right of all members of the SMU community to engage in free and civil speech.
- The Senate also endorses the spirit of the [George/West](#) and [Colgate](#) statements as they insist that free speech should also be deliberate, rational, civil, humble, respectful, and open; in the words of the Colgate report, we should “endeavor to establish and maintain a culture and community that will inspire its members to pursue knowledge with rigor and curiosity, speak and listen with care, and work so that even the quietest or most underrepresented voices among us are heard.” We therefore commit to actively promote a culture, at SMU and beyond, that pursues truth openly, vigorously, and thoughtfully, and in both our speaking and our listening.