

Freedom of Expression Policy

Since its inception, Gettysburg College has been engaged in the defense of freedom of expression, first through the abolitionist movement and then with the College's involvement in the Civil War. The institution was founded in 1832 by anti-slavery theologian Samuel Simon Schmucker, and in 1837 Gettysburg College moved to Pennsylvania Hall, the construction of which was facilitated by benefactor and Trustee Thaddeus Stevens. Aside from his work as a Congressman and activist for universal education, Stevens was a key figure in the passing of the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery. In July 1863, the College was the backdrop for the Battle of Gettysburg and months later, alumnus David Wills was integral to the creation of the Soldiers' National Cemetery. He invited Abraham Lincoln to attend its dedication and it was there that the President issued his call to the country to affirm equality for all in his Gettysburg Address.

Our rich institutional heritage challenges us to engage in and provide leadership for addressing the critical social and political issues of our time. The College is committed to the ideal of free and open inquiry in all matters, as freedom of expression allows us to continually strive to better society and to address injustices. Freedom of expression is invaluable to the institution because it brings together multiple opinions, allows them to coalesce and/or clash, and opens them to the community's reflections, analyses, and critiques.

As an educational institution, we support the freedom of expression of ideas and, in our mission statement, we affirm: the worth and dignity of all people and the limitless value of their intellectual potential; the commitment to a diverse and inclusive learning environment; the power of a liberal arts education to help students develop critical thinking skills, broad vision, effective communication, a sense of the inter-relatedness of all knowledge, sensitivity to the human condition, and a global perspective; the value of a lifelong commitment to service; the value of ethical leadership that is inclusive, collaborative, and directed towards effecting change for the greater good; and our conviction that a residential college best promotes the sense of community central to a liberal arts education, in which personal relationships among students, faculty, and staff can flourish.

The College recognizes that some ideas will be viewed as offensive and disagreeable by some, perhaps even most, members of the community. However, it is not the role of the College to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, uncivil, or even deeply offensive. Rather, we encourage members of the College community to act according to the principle that the best response to ideas that they find offensive is speech, not censorship. Participating in a community where there is a diverse range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences is rewarding for all of our members and the College is committed to nurturing and celebrating this experience. We expect that diverse views and opinions will create conflict and disagreement among us at times, but the genuine sharing of ideas, perspectives, and values presupposes both freedom and responsibility. Consequently,

we expect all members of the community to engage in civil discourse, reasoned thought, sustained discussion, and constructive participation. The freedom to express ideas, exchange views, and engage in protest is essential to the life of the College.

The College encourages its members to make independent judgments about the worth and validity of ideas and to contest ideas with which they disagree. Any effort by members of the College community to limit openness in this academic community is a matter of serious concern and hinders the freedom of expression and the discovery of truth. All members of the community are therefore free to express their points of view on, or opposition to, any issue of public interest within reasonable restrictions of time, place, and manner. Each member of the community is also expected to encourage and facilitate the ability of other community members to express themselves freely. No group or individual has the right to interfere with the legitimate activity of other authorized persons and groups as interference with expression compromises the College's goal of creating an environment where issues can be openly discussed.

The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not, of course, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. We have obligations to protect the dignity and security of all members of the College community from those who would seek to use speech primarily to deprive others of their freedom to learn, their freedom to contribute, and their freedom to participate in our community. Thus, the College may seek to restrict expression that: 1) violates state or federal law; 2) constitutes slander, threats, or harassment; 3) unreasonably invades individual privacy or violates confidentiality interests; or, 4) is directly incompatible with the functioning of the College. In addition, the College may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the College. However, these are limited 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 College's ideals relating to the free and open discussion of ideas.

Gettysburg College's philosophy of freedom of expression reflects our commitment to sustain a community in which all members feel that their ideas, opinions, and beliefs are respected and protected, even when those ideas are not shared universally. We believe the free expression of ideas is a cornerstone of the learning process and it is only through exposure to new concepts, opposing views, and challenging topics that one truly grows in an academic setting. Preventing the free exchange of ideas restricts the generation of knowledge and the ability to discern between what is right and what is wrong. In this sense, Gettysburg College subscribes to the wisdom in the words of Justice Louis D. Brandeis:

"If there be time to expose through discussion the falsehood and fallacies, to avert the evil by the processes of education, the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence."

(Whitney v. California, 274 U.S. 357, 1927)

Sections of this philosophy have been adapted from similar documents produced by the University of Chicago and Franklin & Marshall College.