



## **Fast Facts: The Chicago Statement on Freedom of Expression**

### **What is the Chicago Statement?**

- The “Chicago Statement” refers to the free speech policy statement produced by the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago. In July of 2014, University of Chicago President (now Chancellor) Robert J. Zimmer tasked a university committee led by law professor Geoffrey Stone with “articulating the University’s overarching commitment to free, robust, and uninhibited debate and deliberation among all members of the University’s community.”

### **Why should a school adopt the Chicago Statement?**

- The Chicago Statement is an institutional commitment that protects the free expression rights of students and faculty when teaching, researching, protesting, and learning — and which signals to the public that it is not the university’s role to act as “speech police” when controversy comes to campus. When students and faculty see the leaders of their schools publicly pledge to protect free expression, they feel more secure in speaking their minds. It also sets an important expectation for students that they must come to campus ready to participate in the free exchange of ideas.

### **Who has adopted the Chicago Statement?**

- Faculty bodies, administrations, and institutional governing boards have officially endorsed the Chicago Statement at more than 80 institutions, including Princeton University, Columbia University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Boston University.

### **The Chicago Statement:**

- Is appropriate for and can be adapted to any college—not just the University of Chicago.
- Guarantees, in no uncertain terms, “all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn.” The only exceptions to this broad commitment are for narrowly defined categories of unlawful expression such as defamation and harassment.
- Confirms that civility or other concerns about manners cannot be used to silence important conversation, eloquently stating that “[a]lthough the University greatly values civility...concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.”
- Declares that “it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”
- Urges the university community to act on speech they find controversial “not by seeking to suppress. . . but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose.”
- Asserts that it is the University’s responsibility to promote and protect free debate and discourse, stating that, “Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe.”

**Text of the Chicago Statement:**

<https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FOECommitteeReport.pdf>

**Substantive provisions:**

1. “Because the University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of the University, the University of Chicago fully respects and supports the freedom of all members of the University community ‘to discuss any problem that presents itself.’”
2. “[I]t is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”
3. “Concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.”
4. “The University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the University.”
5. “[T]he University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the University.”
6. “[T]hese are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University’s commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.”
7. “[D]ebate or deliberation 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 wrong-headed.”
8. “It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose.”
9. “[M]embers of the University community must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression.”
10. “Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe.”
11. “[T]he University has 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.”