

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

## Freedom of Expression

As an institution of higher learning dedicated to research, teaching, and service, Vanderbilt is firmly committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression and will maintain the conditions of freedom of inquiry, thought, and discussion on campus. The education of Vanderbilt students is guided by the University's commitment to the principles of academic integrity, open communication and inquiry, nondiscrimination, and civility. Students are considered as partners in this endeavor and, while in a diverse community the views and ideas of its members will inevitably conflict at times, Vanderbilt expects all members of the community to be respectful of each other and to contribute in positive ways to an orderly and civil exchange of diverse ideas and opinions. Vanderbilt seeks to foster a sense of belonging for all students where they can feel welcome and as safe as possible in an environment dedicated to the critical discussion of complex and challenging ideas. Freedom of expression extends to all members of the Vanderbilt community, even when that expression directly challenges the beliefs and ideas of another and even when that expression may be deemed disagreeable or possibly even offensive. When an individual or group deems the ideas of others to be contrary to their own, the response should be to engage in discussion, debate, and mutually respectful dialogue. A core part of the University's mission is to provide opportunities for intellectual exchanges to take place.

To foster such an environment, the following guidelines have been set.

- ⦿ *Meetings open only to members.* A registered student organization may invite any person to address its members, but the organization must follow normal procedures for reservation of space with Student Centers and demonstrate its ability to pay for associated costs.
- ⦿ *Meetings open to the Vanderbilt community.* A registered student organization may invite any person, approved by the majority of its members, who represents a point of view pertinent to the occasion to speak to an assemblage of the Vanderbilt community, provided that the sponsorship of the event is consistent

with the purposes of the organization. The organization must follow normal procedures for reservation of space with Student Centers and demonstrate its ability to pay for associated costs.

- ⦿ *Meetings open to the public.* For open meetings sponsored by a registered student organization, procedures for reserving space through Student Centers must be followed and the organization must demonstrate its ability to pay for associated costs.
- ⦿ Procedures for all types of meetings described above include registering in advance with Student Centers so as to ensure the adequacy of arrangements, minimize schedule conflicts, reserve space, and demonstrate ability to pay for costs incurred.
- ⦿ *Limitations on meetings.* The University may restrict the times and places of registered student organization meetings on University premises. A registered student organization denied permission to sponsor an assembly may appeal the decision to the Dean of Students or the Dean's designee.
- ⦿ *Sponsorship.* A registered student organization that sponsors an activity will be responsible for registration, arrangements, publicity, costs incurred, and the conduct of the participants. The Dean of Students, or the Dean's designee, must approve access to University facilities for requests from registered student organizations that wish to use the facilities for a speaker of their choosing. External groups may cooperate with a registered student organization in a campus event, but the campus organization remains fully responsible for the conduct of the external group, and the Dean of Students or the Dean's designee must pre-approve the arrangement. Student organizations fronting for external groups is prohibited. External groups or individuals wishing to use University facilities independently must conform to University policies and must request access through Student Centers.
- ⦿ *Distribution of printed information or use of electronic media.* Students or student groups who distribute information, whether physically or electronically, are responsible for the content. Students may distribute physical materials, including flyers, leaflets, informational sheets, or similar materials, on Rand Terrace or outside the building in which a meeting has been scheduled by another group or organization, if the distributors position themselves twenty feet from the entrance so as to avoid restricting access. For outdoor events,

distributors may position themselves twenty feet from the reserved lawn or area, again in a manner to avoid restricting access. There may be no charge or requested donations for these materials. Students may also distribute information using electronic media in compliance with the University's [Student Computing Policy](#) (</enrollmentbulletin/policies/student-computing-policy/>) and the [Computing Privileges and Responsibilities Acceptable Use Policy](#) (</info/computing-aup/>). Students distributing information, whether physically or using electronic media, must also comply with the policies found in the "[Communication and Promotion](/student_handbook/student-engagement/#publicity-promotions-and-advertising)" section, by including the name and contact information of the distributing individual or group on each piece of printed or electronic material. If the group is not a registered student organization, the names of the individual students responsible for the information must also be provided.

## ⦿ *Demonstrations, Dissents, and Protests*

### ⦿ *Definitions*

- ⦿ **Demonstrations.** Demonstrations are independent from any other event or activity occurring on campus. A Demonstration is different from a Protest in that the time, date, and location are not connected to a campus speaker, event, or activity, nor does it need to be for it to accomplish its goal.
- ⦿ **Dissents.** Dissents are short and spontaneous non-violent verbal or non-verbal reactions to a speaker.
- ⦿ **Protests.** Protests are responses to or intentionally take place during other events or activities occurring on campus. A Protest is different from a Demonstration in that the time, date, and location are connected to a campus speaker, event, or activity, and does so in order to accomplish its goal.
- ⦿ **Organizer.** An Organizer is one who is either primarily responsible for planning, funding, or executing a Demonstration or Protest or is so associated with the Demonstration or Protest that a reasonable person would infer that responsibility.

### ⦿ *Introduction*

- ⦿ Demonstrations, Dissents, and Protests are a necessary and valued form of expression. Individuals and organizations seeking to organize a Demonstration or Protest should contact the Dean of Students to assist with planning. The Dean of Students or Dean's designee will advise Organizers on execution of the activity with the goal that it occur as envisioned with minimal complications. All University policies apply during Demonstrations, Dissents, and Protests. Organizers as well as those participating—including, but not limited to, faculty, staff, students, and the public—are responsible for knowing and abiding by University policies as well as local, state, and federal laws and regulations.

- ⦿ *Planning*

- ⦿ When possible, a request to hold a Demonstration or Protest should be submitted to the Dean of Students at least 48 hours prior to the planned activity to ensure its successful execution. The submission should include the time, date, and location. The University may require Organizers to move the time, date, and location if it is determined the Demonstration or Protest, as planned, would be disruptive to campus operations, impede the free flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic, violate University policies, or significantly infringe on the rights of other members of the University community.
- ⦿ For Demonstrations and Protests occurring on campus, only registered student organizations, administrative offices, or academic departments may reserve space. Students not affiliated with a registered student organization, administrative office, or academic departments may only use campus space on a first-come basis and at the discretion of the University. The Dean of Students or Dean's designee can reserve space for such students who have properly engaged in the planning process. The public, including parents and alumni, may not participate in or be invited to an on-campus Demonstration or

Protest, except when permitted via the event registration process outlined in this section of the Student Handbook.

- ⦿ For Demonstrations and Protests occurring off campus on city sidewalks and streets adjacent to the University, Organizers should make appropriate arrangements to acquire city permits and should adhere to city ordinances and applicable local, state and federal law. The public may participate in off-campus Demonstrations and Protests.
  
- ⦿ *Impromptu and Spontaneous Activism*
  - ⦿ On occasion, Demonstrations and Protests cannot reasonably meet the advance planning requirement. In such cases, Organizers are strongly encouraged to seek an expedited review of plans by the Dean of Students or Dean's designee.
  - ⦿ If Demonstrations or Protests occur without an expedited review, the University may discuss with Organizers whether relocation to another space on campus is appropriate prior to denying a request or terminating the Activism.
  - ⦿ Dissent, by its nature, is impromptu or spontaneous. Dissent may occur without any prior University review, but the University retains the right to terminate such activity should it convert to Protest or Demonstration or otherwise be disruptive to campus operations, impede the free flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic, violate University policies, or significantly infringe on the rights of other members of the University community.
  
- ⦿ *Implementation*
  - ⦿ Demonstrations
    - ⦿ During Demonstrations, Organizers and participants may engage in audible and symbolic acts (e.g., giving speeches, chanting, marching, holding signs, or similarly raising awareness of a national, local, or campus issue).

- ⦿ Amplified sound should only be used outside of campus buildings and must comply with all applicable noise policies and ordinances. In campus buildings, demonstrations should comply with maximum occupancy for fire safety.
  
- ⦿ Protests & Dissents
  - ⦿ During Protests, Organizers and participants may engage in silent and symbolic acts (e.g., picketing, holding signs, turning backs, covering ears, or similarly raising awareness of a national, local, or campus issue) unless a space has been designated by the University for audible acts or the protest is so far from the targeted campus event or activity as to not reasonably disturb participants. Dissents are also an appropriate form of protest.
  - ⦿ Both Protests and Dissents should respect the rights of others wishing to engage in the University activity or event that is the focus of Activism. Others should be allowed free and safe access to the meeting or activity, unobstructed and uninterrupted viewing, the ability to hear and view a speaker uninterrupted, as well as the ability to otherwise reasonably participate.
  
- ⦿ Distribution of Literature
  - ⦿ Refer to the *Distribution of printed information or use of electronic media* policy in this section of the Student Handbook.
  
- ⦿ University Officials
  - ⦿ The University may, at its discretion, have individuals from Student Affairs, Vanderbilt University Public Safety, or other University departments present at Protests, Demonstrations, and other events to observe

and advise. Organizers and participants are expected to comply with instructions of University officials.

- ⦿ Relocation or Termination

- ⦿ The University will work with Organizers and participants to relocate Demonstrations and Protests that may or terminate Demonstrations and Protests that do disrupt campus operations, impede the free flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic, violate University policies, or significantly infringes on the rights of other members of the University community.
- ⦿ Demonstrations and Protests are not permitted to occur in the following locations:
  - ⦿ Private offices, research laboratories or associated facilities, and computer centers;
  - ⦿ Specific areas of offices, museums, libraries, and other facilities that contain valuable or sensitive materials, collections, equipment, and records protected by law, or by existing University policy, such as educational records, student-related or personnel-related records, or financial records;
  - ⦿ Classrooms, art and music practice rooms, seminar rooms, auditoriums, meeting rooms, or outdoor spaces in which University academic courses are being held or are scheduled to be held;
  - ⦿ Residential areas during quiet hours; and
  - ⦿ Student Health Center, University Counseling Center, Student Care Coordination, Center for Student Wellbeing, Project Safe, Title IX office, Vanderbilt University Police Department headquarters, Vanderbilt University Medical

Center, other administrative offices in which student privacy is paramount, critical infrastructure (such as the Power House), as well as the surrounding green space or grounds (including, but not limited to, sidewalks, access roads, parking areas, etc.), and any other space that obstructs entry or access to Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

### ⦿ Disorderly Conduct

- ⦿ Riots or other destructive gatherings are never permitted. Use of masks (other than those required for health-related reasons) or costumes that obscure participants' identity, brandishing of weapons or items that could reasonably be believed to be weapons, words and actions that may incite violence, physical altercations, and any other act a reasonable person would believe is designed to intimidate or threaten others is prohibited.
- ⦿ Conduct that obstructs or disrupts teaching, administration, University procedures and activities, or other authorized activities on University premises is prohibited.
- ⦿ Conduct that impedes University events and activities—including, but not limited to, excessive noise, continually interrupting a speaker, preventing an audience from seeing/engaging with a speaker or participating in an activity, disrupting the viewing of a presentation or speaker, blocking entrances or exits, or impeding free movement—is prohibited.
- ⦿ Disorderly conduct, as outlined above, may subject an Organizer or participant to removal from the event, referral for disciplinary action through the University's

accountability process, or other legal action available to the University. While the campus is generally open to the public, the University may cite with trespassing individuals engaging in prohibited conduct during Demonstrations, Dissents, and Protests.

### ⦿ *Debrief*

- ⦿ Organizers are encouraged to meet with the Dean of Students or Dean's designee after a Demonstration or Protest has occurred to review successes and challenges for future planning.
  
- ⦿ Registered student organizations may also order films to show on campus. The motion picture titles shown on the Vanderbilt campus must be cleared by the distributors for public performance exhibition. This means that Vanderbilt has the legal right to show titles before groups of students, faculty, and their friends on campus. The “home use” versions of these same titles, obtained from video stores, etc., are not cleared by the distributors for public performance use by the University, because proper licensing fees to the copyright owners have not been paid for such use. Films, videos, or DVDs may not be shown to dorm audiences, clubs, fraternities, sororities, or other organizations, without first obtaining a public performance license. Student Centers, 615-322-2448, can provide additional information. Information about the sale of printed statements, etc., and the display of posters can be found in the sections [“Sale and Solicitation and Fundraising \(/student\\_handbook/student-engagement/#sale-solicitation-and-fundraising\)”](/student_handbook/student-engagement/#sale-solicitation-and-fundraising) and [“Communication and Promotion \(/student\\_handbook/student-engagement/#publicity-promotions-and-advertising\).”](/student_handbook/student-engagement/#publicity-promotions-and-advertising)

[\[ Back to Top \]](#)

**Funding (See also [“Sale, Solicitation, and Fundraising \(/student\\_handbook/student-engagement/#sale-solicitation-and-fundraising\).”](/student_handbook/student-engagement/#sale-solicitation-and-fundraising))**