

About K-State

Statement on Free Speech and Expression

Kansas State University has a long and proud history of commitment to free and open inquiry, deliberation and debate in all matters, and the untrammelled verbal and nonverbal expression of ideas. It is the University's guiding principle to provide all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn.

The ideas of different members of the University community will often and naturally conflict, and some individuals' ideas will even conflict with the University's values and principles. But 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. Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, 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.

The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. The University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or unlawful discrimination, or that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests. In addition, the University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the University or endanger safety. But these 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 free and open discussion of ideas.

As a corollary to the University's commitment to protect and promote free expression, members of the University community must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression. 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. To this end, the 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.

The University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that viewpoints 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. Controversial speech and robust debate are expected and valued on college campuses and in our society. Moreover, the right to engage in such expression is one of our most cherished rights, protected by the United States Constitution. Without unwavering protection of that right, our society would suffer, and the vulnerable in our society would suffer the most. Progress such as civil rights movements and the resulting gains would not be possible.

It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to judge the value of ideas, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting those arguments and ideas that they oppose. Fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage with each other in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the University's educational mission.

View the [Kansas Board of Regents Statements on Free Expression \(https://www.k-state.edu/disclosures/kbor-free-expression.html\)](https://www.k-state.edu/disclosures/kbor-free-expression.html).

This statement borrows from the Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression of the University of Chicago. It has been endorsed by President Richard Myers, the President's Cabinet and Faculty Senate leadership.