



Vanderbilt's Commitment to Free Expression

From our beginning, we've believed in the power of bringing together people of differing viewpoints for a common purpose. A long-standing commitment to free expression is fundamental to who we are.

Our Commitment

Free expression is essential to a university's very purpose. Transformative education, pathbreaking research and the timeless search for truth all require a wide variety of viewpoints, the uninhibited exchange of ideas, the persistent challenging of conventional wisdom, and courageous and vigorous debate.

A university that dutifully transmits canonical knowledge, but is not at the same time alive with diverse perspectives, probing critique and the practice of query and argument, is a university in name only.

At Vanderbilt, we have a long tradition of free expression. At a moment when free expression on college campuses and in American civic life is at risk, we are proud to affirm our commitment to this core principle.

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A university's obligation is not to protect students from ideas, but rather to expose them to ideas, and to help make them capable of handling and, hopefully, having ideas.

Alexander Heard
Vanderbilt's fifth chancellor

Our Approach

Vanderbilt's approach to free expression rests on three pillars: open forums, institutional neutrality and civil discourse.

Open Forums +

Institutional Neutrality —

Institutional neutrality is the commitment our university leaders make to refrain from taking public positions on controversial issues unless the issue is materially related to the core mission and functioning of the university. Institutional neutrality does not obligate a university's students and faculty to remain silent—rather, its aim is to allow the greatest possible space for student and faculty voices.

The practice of institutional neutrality is an acknowledgment by Vanderbilt's leaders that the role of a university's administration is to encourage debates, not settle them.

[Read the Chancellor's Inside Higher Ed OpEd](#)

Civil Discourse +