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Our Statement on Statements

In This Section

Dear Members of the Campus Community,

The new year presents us with the opportunity to reimagine the community we aspire to become and take stock of all that we have learned from the past twelve months.

2023 has made clear to me, and many others in higher education, the importance of institutional voice. College and university leaders can command significant attention and connect with large audiences of students, faculty and staff, community leaders and alumni. This influence should be wielded responsibly.

Colleges and universities can foster healthier campus climates by demonstrating transparency and consistency in their approach to institutional statements and their use of institutional voice. Going forward, Holy Cross will no longer comment, as an institution, on matters or events that are not directly connected to our work and identity as an academic institution.

I am the president of the nation's only exclusively undergraduate Jesuit, Catholic liberal arts college. My email inbox, however, tells another story replete with frequent correspondence from individuals who, depending on the issue at hand, make requests of both my voice and my silence on matters that have little to do with leading the College of the Holy Cross.

I am not alone or unique. This is an experience shared by almost every College and university president today, but these pressures are not new. There is historical precedent in American higher education. I was four years old when the University of Chicago published the [Kalven Report](#), its groundbreaking statement on the university's role in political and social action. A little over 20 years ago—and with far fewer words—the University of Wisconsin-Madison issued brief clarification on its institutional voice amidst the turmoil of the invasion of Iraq (“The University of Wisconsin does not have a foreign policy.”) This shift in cultural expectations around institutional voice accelerated with the advent of social media. The growth of digital platforms that encourage near-constant discourse led to increasing demand for this particular form of communication from colleges and universities.

In our roles as presidents and senior leaders we speak not only as individuals but as institutional representatives, and there is considerable public appetite for that contribution. This moment in time invites us to deeper reflection. When and why do we speak up? How might the College's voice impact our community and the outcome of broader events? How might our silence be perceived?

It is essential to focus first upon our shared understanding of what we do at Holy Cross and in higher education more broadly. Holy Cross is an academic institution, defined by our commitment to intellectual freedom and academic inquiry, and called to engage in critical examination, scholarship and dialogue across differences.

In this time of prolific public statements, there is an expectation that colleges and universities—rather than the critical thinkers within those institutions—should participate regularly in broader public discourse. I have come to appreciate more deeply the impact of institutional statements on campus culture and in the classroom. Statements on politics and current events may unintentionally deter campus members from fully expressing their views or engaging in scholarship. For faculty and staff, the College serves as their employer. For students, the College offers an educational experience and confers their degree.

At Holy Cross, an institutional statement is authored by members of the senior leadership team and designed to offer the College's response or perspective on topics directly related to our work, mission, or the roles served by campus community members. Institutional statements are not opinion pieces, personal social media posts, lectures, teach-ins, debates or vehicles for geopolitical advocacy. All of the aforementioned communications, even those which may be

controversial, unpopular or polemic, are welcome at Holy Cross. A commitment to academic freedom is a commitment to enable and protect a vibrant culture of inquiry and dialogue.

There are several instances where the College can and should use its voice and issue statements. In reflecting on when and why to make an institutional statement on an issue or event, our administration will be influenced by factors such as:

Whether it affects the College's or higher education's ability to pursue its core educational mission;

Whether it directly and significantly impacts the ability of our campus community members to fulfill their roles; and

Whether our particular Jesuit, Catholic mission and identity call us to join other higher education institutions to help positively influence the matter.

These guiding principles for the College's institutional voice do not apply to individuals in our learning community. As I [communicated last fall](#), faculty and students are supported and encouraged to engage in scholarship, pedagogy and advocacy to effect positive change by:

Discussing events and politics in Holy Cross classrooms and fostering open dialogue for students;

Hosting seminars, forums and events to learn about current issues and histories; and

Engaging and sharing in research, publications and creative work.

I am committed to supporting a healthy and engaged academic environment at Holy Cross. That invites me, as president, to be reflective and transparent in my approach as a leader. I and other members of the leadership team will continue to communicate regularly about campus life, matters core to our institution and identity, and institutional planning. You can continue to count on the College to support your voice and scholarship as we engage in the critical work of sharing, shaping and supporting an excellent and diverse academic environment.

Sincerely,

Vincent D. Rougeau

President

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