

February 25, 2025

President Valerio Ferme
New Mexico State University
Hadley Hall, 2850 Weddell Dr.
Las Cruces, NM 88003-8001

Sent via Electronic Mail (president@nmsu.edu)

Dear President Ferme:

I write to you today on behalf of FIRE, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to defending freedom of speech,¹ to congratulate you on your recent appointment as President of New Mexico State University, and to discuss ways FIRE can collaborate with your administration to improve the climate for free expression on campus early in your tenure. We have a plethora of resources available to assist you in protecting student and faculty expression, all free of charge in accordance with FIRE's charitable mission.

First, FIRE can assist NMSU in revising its current policies governing student expression. FIRE catalogs the speech-related policies in place at almost 500 colleges and universities — including at NMSU, which earns a “yellow light” rating from FIRE for maintaining two policies that, by virtue of vague wording, can too easily be applied to restrict protected expression.²

Second, FIRE can help you assess NMSU's overall climate for free speech. FIRE conducts the largest survey of its kind to track the climate for free expression on individual campuses nationwide and uses these findings, alongside other research, to rank schools from best to worst in our annual College Free Speech Rankings.³ NMSU ranked 31 out of 251 institutions in our most recent rankings, indicating an already fairly strong environment for free expression overall. However, NMSU scored low on survey components measuring how open students are to having difficult conversations on campus, as well as how often they self-censor themselves.⁴ Accordingly, we would be pleased to make recommendations tailored to these concerns.

¹ For more than 25 years, FIRE has defended freedom of expression, conscience, and other individual rights, as well as due process, on America's college and university campuses. You can learn more about our mission and activities at thefire.org.

² *New Mexico State University*, Speech Code Rating, FIRE, (last visited December 3, 2024), <https://www.thefire.org/colleges/new-mexico-state-university>.

³ *2025 College Free Speech Rankings*, FIRE, (last visited November 18, 2024), rankings.thefire.org/rank.

⁴ Please find more information about NMSU's ranking at <https://rankings.thefire.org/rank/school/new-mexico-state-university-main-campus>.

Third, FIRE can assist NMSU in cementing a climate of free expression by adopting an institutional free speech statement. We suggest modeling this policy on the “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression” at the University of Chicago, better known as the “Chicago Statement.”⁵ At the University of Chicago, as well as at the more than 100 institutions that have adopted their own version of the Chicago Statement, this policy has led to significant improvements in the campus climate for free speech.⁶

Fourth, FIRE can work with NMSU to adopt a commitment to institutional neutrality modeled after the principles expressed in the University of Chicago’s Report on the University’s Role in Political and Social Action (the “Kalven Report”).⁷ Taking this step will encourage discourse to flourish at NMSU and allow students and faculty to engage in debates on contemporary issues, free from institutional pressure.

FIRE’s Policy Reform team has worked closely with college and university administrators for years to improve the climate for freedom of expression on campuses nationwide. We would be pleased to put our experience to work for you and your students. You may reach FIRE Director of Policy Reform Laura Beltz at 215-717-3473 or at laura@thefire.org, or I would be happy to work with your staff to set up a mutually convenient time to chat.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Holley
Program Manager, Engagement and Mobilization

Cc: Lakshmi N. Reddi, Interim Provost & Chief Academic Officer

⁵ *The Chicago Statement*, FIRE, (last visited November 18, 2024), thefire.org/research-learn/chicago-statement.

⁶ The full list of institutions that have endorsed a statement on free speech in the model of the “Chicago Statement” is available at thefire.org/chicago-statement-university-and-faculty-body-support.

⁷ *Adopting Institutional Neutrality*, FIRE, <https://www.thefire.org/defending-your-rights/reforming-college-policies/adopting-institutional-neutrality> (last visited November 21, 2024).