

Institutional Voice

In the fall of 2024, President Brian W. Casey formed a Task Force on Institutional Voice to consider whether and when Colgate University should issue official statements about national or world events.

Recommendation from the Colgate University Task Force on Institutional Voice

Pursuant to university governance, the President has the authority to assemble special Task Forces to consider and make recommendations to the President on current matters. As stated in the Faculty Handbook,

At times, ... significant issues arise that are all-University in nature or that encompass several areas of responsibility. In these cases, the President of the University may find it desirable to appoint ad hoc Task Forces, which report directly to the President. Such an action has official standing within the Governance System. Task Forces are appointed only for a specific period of time and have two functions: (1) they serve as advisory groups to the President of the University, and (2) they make legislative proposals to the Academic and/or Student Affairs Boards, if appropriate. The President appoints the chair and membership of the Task Forces.

The Task Force and the Charge

In September 2024, after consultation with the Faculty Affairs Committee as well as the Board of Trustees, the Task Force on Institutional Voice was constituted, consisting of faculty, administrators and trustees. The Task Force was charged with developing principles and guidelines regarding the use of Colgate's institutional voice, and the issuance of institutional (or presidential) statements about political or other national events, historical events, or anniversaries.

Task Force Recommendation

At the heart of Colgate's educational mission is the rigorous pursuit of knowledge within a community that has deep respect for the complexity of human understanding. As articulated in its Statement on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, this mission informs Colgate's commitment to promoting open inquiry and freedom of expression within an environment in which all voices—including those who may be in the minority—are engaged with care and respect.

With this as our guide, we recommend that the University respond to national or global events by promoting venues for people to come together to explore, question, and reflect upon them. Rather than reducing the diversity of campus perspectives to one institutional statement—which risks marginalizing some voices and limiting open, rigorous, and ongoing inquiry—the University should actively facilitate such open inquiry throughout our campus. This approach leverages the expertise of faculty and the insights of the broader community—students, staff, alumni — while remaining responsive to the collective knowledge and needs of all.

Colgate's mission has long been undertaken within a residential setting that, in the words of its Mission Statement, “encourages interpersonal exploration, expands mutual understanding, and supports a broadened perspective within a caring, humane community.” These goals are best achieved by continuously cultivating spaces on campus for dialogue, growth, and learning. Such venues are especially important in times of global or domestic challenges, when the university needs to marshal and draw upon the full range of perspectives in our community.

While individuals have freedom of expression as members of this community, it is our recommendation that Colgate's institutional voice be used solely for the promotion and support of educational venues such as those described above — except in circumstances where the specific operations of the University are directly affected. By centering its efforts on dialogue, critical thinking, and the pursuit of knowledge, Colgate will stay true to its mission and values.

Task Force Members

Jenna Reinbold, Task Force Chairperson; Associate Professor of Religion; Director, Native American Studies Program

April Baptiste, Associate Dean of the Faculty for Global and Local Initiatives; Leary Family Chair in Environmental Studies; Professor of Environmental Studies and Africana & Latin American Studies

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