



September 26, 2025

Via Electronic Mail and First-Class Mail

Charlotte Arneson, Program Counsel, Campus Rights Advocacy
Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression
510 Walnut Street, Suite 900
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Re: Oakland University's Longstanding Commitment to Freedom of Speech

Dear Ms. Arneson:

I am responding on Oakland University's ("University") behalf to FIRE's September 16, 2025 letter regarding the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. I am also responding to the unfortunate and inaccurate claims made about the University, which were attributed to FIRE, in a Newsweek article dated September 24, 2025.

At the outset, it is important to note that FIRE has confirmed in writing to the University that FIRE's September 16th letter "was not issued as a result of any complaints alleging that the University violated anyone's First Amendment rights." Moreover, FIRE has also confirmed in writing that FIRE's letter was "sent in response to online calls for the university to investigate students, **not any perceived or actual university action**." (emphasis added)

I trust that FIRE will publish this response on its website, alongside the September 16th letter that FIRE already published on its website, to dispel any actual or perceived implications that the University has already taken – or is poised to take – any actions that might infringe upon the First Amendment rights of any faculty, students, or staff.

As for the First Amendment principles referenced in FIRE's September 16th letter, I have been clear, consistent, and unequivocal in my belief that universities must not only respect student, faculty, and staff First Amendment rights, but also be places where freedom of speech is a robust part of our work. I have spoken publicly on the University's campus and written several pieces for state and national publications on this subject. For example:

- In *The Hill*, I co-wrote with Michigan Congresswoman Haley Stevens that "The antidote to hate speech is more speech, and the antidote to ignorance is more and better education."
- In a recent *Detroit News* op-ed, alongside three faculty colleagues, I wrote: "Campuses should promote inclusion by recommitting themselves to robust free-speech policies."
- In a different *Detroit News* op-ed, I wrote: "Universities must be places where education opens students' minds; fosters ways they can express their thoughts, emotions and compassion; encourages debates; and builds understanding of a diversity of viewpoints."

- In *Bridge Magazine*, I argued, also along with three faculty colleagues, that “America's universities must educate students in practices of good citizenship, without becoming echo chambers of narrow ideologies. Our institutions need to foster free speech; but we must do more, including not washing our hands of the responsibility to train students in critical thinking and responsible disagreement.”

The University has taken many concrete steps to safeguard free expression on its campus, including without limitation the following:

- The University has supported and welcomed speakers from across the ideological spectrum, as well as those who have championed free speech.
- Viewpoint diversity and free speech have been advanced across the University, including through our Center for Civic Engagement, Cis Maisel Center for Judaic Studies and Community Engagement, Center for Public Humanities, Department of History, and many others.
- The University hosts an annual OU Student Freedom of Speech contest.
 - The contest has been applauded by a member of the Michigan Legislature and has been noted in local media reports.
 - The University and I highlight this each year and take proactive steps to encourage students to participate.
 - I have personally made a gift to endow this annual prize.
- I published a campus-wide statement following Charlie Kirk's murder, that condemned political violence, welcomed a diversity of viewpoints, including those that challenge us, and upheld the free exchange of competing ideas.
- The University permitted a large student-run vigil in memory of Charlie Kirk.
- In the face of calls by some on campus to cancel the Charlie Kirk vigil, we respected the First Amendment rights of both vigil organizers and protestors.
- Just today (9/26) one of the University's History faculty members had an opinion article published in the Detroit News acknowledging the current free speech tipping point we face. In his argument, he also championed free speech on college campuses.

I also need to address the inaccurate statements about the University that were reported in the Newsweek article and attributed to FIRE. The Newsweek article states that:

According to FIRE, 87 colleges and universities are under their review for actions against students, faculty, or staff over remarks about Kirk's killing. The group has formally contacted at least 17 of the institutions, alleging improper investigations or punishment of speech protected by the First Amendment.

The list includes major public universities such as the University of Texas at Austin and University of Nebraska-Lincoln, as well as regional schools like Missouri State University, Florida Atlantic University, Oakland University in Michigan and California State University-Monterey Bay.

FIRE has confirmed in writing that, notwithstanding the statements attributed to FIRE in the Newsweek article, "FIRE is not investigating any claims or allegations against Oakland University and the statements in the Newsweek article are the result of a misunderstanding between FIRE staff and Newsweek."

The reputational damage caused by such inaccurate statements is immeasurable, and is only exacerbated when paired with the implications inherent in the tone and tenor of the September 16th letter. At a minimum, the University requests that FIRE: (i) request that Newsweek issue an appropriate correction; and (ii) issue its own statement, posted on the FIRE website, confirming that FIRE is not investigating any claims or allegations against Oakland University as stated in the Newsweek article.

In closing, both I and the University have demonstrated a continuing and unwavering commitment to the First Amendment through our individual and collective actions that started long before and will continue long after FIRE's September 16th letter. Thank you for taking all of this information into consideration as you rate the University's commitment to free speech in future press releases, rankings and interviews with media members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ora Pescovitz", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.
President

Cc: Boyd C. Farnam
Vice President for Legal Affairs and General Counsel