FAQ: Adopting Free Speech Lessons for Orientation & First-Year Experience Programming

What are the Free Speech Lessons for Orientation and First-Year Experience Programming?

FIRE, in partnership with New York University's First Amendment Watch, has developed a series of free-to-use modules, videos, and other resources for universities to utilize when teaching incoming students about their free speech rights and the principles behind the First Amendment. All of the resources are available at thefire.org/orientation.

The video lessons are geared towards universities looking for resources to include in digital first-year experience programming or university web pages explaining student rights. The written lessons and activities can be used during in-person freshman orientation, first-year seminars, or classes that need succinct lessons and resources.

What topics do our materials cover?

Our lessons and materials cover:

- Talking across differences
- Limits to free speech
- The First Amendment and campus life
- Campus speakers and counter-protests
- Offensive speech on campus
- The history of student protests

- Academic freedom and classroom speech
- Arguments in defense of free expression
- The role of student publications on campus
- Social media and online speech rights
- Recommended common reads

We created a plethora of resources so universities can tailor the program to fit their needs. We are more than happy to work with you to determine the best selection of lessons for the time and space you have available.

Why should free speech principles be taught during first-year experience programming?

Especially during freshman year, students are eager to exercise their free speech rights — joining student groups, getting involved in protests or politics, and finding new ways to explore their interests. For a school to have an open and robust campus climate for free expression, incoming students need to understand the importance and contours of exercising their First Amendment rights and also how to respect the rights of others. Orientation and first-year experience programming can give students a positive environment to learn about their rights before being faced with controversy.

My team has limited time and many programs. Which materials should we prioritize?

FIRE and First Amendment Watch are happy to sit down with your team and help decide which lessons work best for your community or how to distribute information online.

If you have 30 minutes to spare for in-person orientation programming, we suggest...

- Talking Across Differences lesson

- Student Protest Then and Now lesson and small group activity with campus student leaders
    - Hand out the First Amendment and Campus Life FAQ

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If you have 1 hour…

- **Talking Across Differences** lesson

- **Student Protest Then and Now** lesson and small group activity with campus student leaders
    - Hand out the **First Amendment and Campus Life FAQ**

- **Limits to Free Speech** lesson

- One to two more lessons that best fit your campus needs:
    - Past conflicts over invited speakers? Use the **Campus Speakers and Counter Protests** lesson or the **Three Arguments in Defense of Free Expression** lesson.
    - A history of students trying to censor one another or social media conflicts? Use the **Offensive Speech on Campus** lesson or **Social Media and Online Speech Rights** lesson.
    - Conflicts over academic freedom or professor speech? Use the **Academic Freedom and Classroom Speech** lesson and faculty panel activity.
    - Controversial articles in your student newspaper or need content for a journalism program? Use the **Role of Student Publications on Campus** lesson.

If you don't have time for in-person programming, you could…

- Use our video lessons in online programming or first-year seminars.

- Create a webpage (like **Arizona State University's**) featuring:
    - University commitments to academic freedom and the First Amendment
    - Resources for conflict resolution
    - Relevant videos from our program and the text of our **First Amendment and Campus Life FAQ**

- Assign books from our list of **Recommended Common Reads** that prepare incoming students to be intellectually curious when they arrive on campus.

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