

Ashland University Adopts Chicago Principles of Free Speech

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10/3/17 ASHLAND, Ohio – The Ashland University Board of Trustees, students and administration have endorsed a document that calls for an overarching commitment to free speech among all members of the Ashland University community and affirms a set of principles designed to protect free expression.

“The adoption of this Ashland University Free Speech Principles is in part a response to a resolution passed by AU Student Senate calling on the university to protect and ensure the students’ and faculty’s moral and legal right to freedom of speech guaranteed under the United States Constitution,” said AU President Dr. Carlos Campo.

According to Dr. Campo, AU’s document adopts free speech principles and language based upon the University of Chicago’s principles of free speech, which state that the university’s fundamental commitment is “to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose.”

Campo agrees, noting that college is a time for students to learn to deal with challenging and unsettling ideas. “Our students will be confronted with these ideas in the real world, so college should prepare them so they are able to respond to such ideas with conviction and passion,” he said.

Naomi Sims, an AU senior and the Academic Affairs officer on the Student Senate Executive Board as well as an Ashbrook Scholar and Honors Student, said, “Censorship of expression does not foster growth or knowledge but rather can be a tool of control and oppression. Conversely, much growth and discovery results from discourse and debate even when the topic is uncomfortable or contrary to my personal values. For these reasons I stand in solidarity with my fellow student senators of Ashland University in supporting the AU Free Speech Principles.”

Campo said Ashland University believes that “Almighty God hath created the mind free” and that the individual's free mind has the right to pursue the truth, form opinions about what is true and communicate those to other free minds.

“Because Ashland University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn,” he continued. “Ashland University fully respects and supports the freedom of all members of the Ashland University community to discuss any problem that presents itself.”

By adopting these principles, Ashland University joins universities like Purdue, Princeton, Johns Hopkins and others in taking a strong stand in favor of freedom of expression.

The rest of the Ashland University Free Speech Principles is quoted below:

“Of course, the ideas of different members of the Ashland University community will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of Ashland University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable or even deeply offensive. Although Ashland University greatly values civility, and although all members of the Ashland University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some, most, or even all members of our community.”

The freedom to discuss and debate the merits of competing ideas does not, of course, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. Ashland University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment that invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests in any essentially intolerable manner. In addition, Ashland University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of Ashland University. But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of speech, and it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with Ashland University's commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.

In a word, Ashland University's commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the Ashland University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the Ashland University community to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose. Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the Ashland University community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of Ashland University's educational mission.

As a corollary to Ashland University's commitment to protect and promote free speech, members of the Ashland University community must also act in conformity with the principles of free speech. Although members of the Ashland University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe. To this end, Ashland University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.

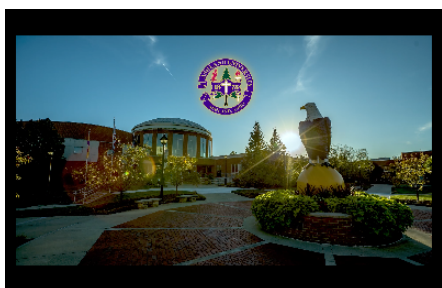
By this commitment, we affirm the freedom of the human mind to pursue the truth and share its pursuit with other free minds.”

Ashland University, ranked in the top tier of colleges and universities in U.S. News and World Report's National Universities category for 2017, is a mid-sized, private university conveniently located a short distance from Akron, Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio. Ashland University (www.ashland.edu) deeply values the individual student and offers a unique educational experience that combines the challenge of strong, applied academic programs with a faculty and staff who build nurturing relationships with their students. ###

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PR Office Contact

Hugh Howard

Media Relations and Social Media Manager

hhoward4@ashland.edu

office: 419-289-5007

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