

## UNIVERSITY COMMITMENT TO ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Because the University of South Carolina 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. And because the University of South Carolina is a public university, such guarantees are further backed by our Constitution. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are both necessary to the functioning of the University, and Constitutionally permitted, the University of South Carolina fully respects and supports the freedom of all members of the University community “to discuss any problem that presents itself.”

Of course, the ideas of different members of the Carolina community will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even offensive. Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the Carolina 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 suppressing the discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not, of course, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. Insofar as it is consistent with the First Amendment guarantees of the Constitution, the University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the University. In addition, the University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the University. But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University’s commitment to protect a completely free and open discussion and exchange of ideas without fear of punishment or other form of retribution.

In a word, 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 Carolina 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. Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the Carolina community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the University’s educational mission.

As a corollary to the University of South Carolina's commitment to protect and promote free expression, members of the University community must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression. Although members of the Carolina 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, the University of South Carolina 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.

*This statement was originally drafted and adopted by the University of Chicago and has been modified for the University of South Carolina.*