

To: Leslie Corbly <[REDACTED]>
Cc: Raymond Ou <[REDACTED]>, VPGC <[REDACTED]>

Dear Ms. Corbly:

Thank you for your February 9, 2024, letter to President Sylvia Burwell.

American University is, as you note, dedicated to protecting free expression for all its community members. We have long recognized that protections “for free expression play an essential role in creating space for individuals to practice the ethos of inquiry, which is fundamental to the mission of a university.”^[1] President Burwell’s January 25 announcement underlining the rights and responsibilities of all community members did not change that commitment.

What has changed are the steps we are taking to limit the disruption of AU’s core mission of education, research, and service, and to make clear the university can determine the time, place, and manner of demonstrations and other activities. Students still have the ability to protest, to have their voices heard, and to study and live in a community of belonging.

We are engaging with student leaders to ensure all members of the university have the opportunity to express and defend their views. We have also convened a Working Group on Free Expression, which includes faculty and staff, to discuss and offer guidance to the AU community on the application of the Freedom of Expression policy in specific contexts. The actions outlined on January 25 are in place to address immediate needs and will be evaluated with extensive community input at the conclusion of the semester.

Our highest priorities will continue to be ensuring the safety of our students, supporting our community members, and continuing the important work it will take to move education and dialogue forward. We appreciate your interest, and always welcome FIRE’s input.

Sincerely,

Sarah



Sarah G. Baldassaro

Chief of Staff and Counselor to the President

American University

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