

Policy Manual – Free Speech, Academic Freedom, & Civility

GOVERNANCE AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Section 212 Free Speech, Academic Freedom, and Civility

Effective: 11/21/67

Last Revised: 1/23/74; 3/27/17, 3/10/25

Responsible Office: General Counsel

Policy Statement:

The University of Maine System is an organization of public institutions of higher education committed to excellence in teaching, research, and public service. Together, the students, faculty, and staff form our statewide University community. The quality of life on and about the System's member universities is vitally enhanced by preserving the rights and freedoms described in this policy.

The Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System affirms its commitment to the rights of free speech, free inquiry, and academic freedom. To protect these rights, all members of the University community should act toward each other with civility, mutual respect, integrity, and reason.

Free speech, free inquiry and academic freedom, and civility are interrelated and interdependent rights and values that will be protected together at University of Maine System institutions according to the following policies.

Free Speech:

The Board of Trustees is committed to protecting the rights all University community members share to free speech, which includes free expression and assembly, as enshrined in the U.S. and Maine State Constitutions. These fundamental rights shall be exercised in a manner that does not:

- i. violate the law,
- ii. defame specific individuals, or
- iii. intend or can be reasonably be interpreted to objectively threaten, harass others, or violate privacy or confidentiality requirements or interests.

The University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of the exercise of these rights to preserve order for the System's universities to function as institutions of higher learning.

Free speech requires tolerance for diversity of opinion and respect for an individual's right to express his or her beliefs, however unpopular they may be, without social or legal prohibition or fear of sanction. Tolerating and respecting another's views, however, does not mean those views are immune from critical scrutiny. Indeed, it is the university's responsibility to foster an environment where all are free to critically evaluate the ideas presented to them, and to accept critical evaluation of their own ideas.

Finally, although the University System greatly values civility and expects community members to share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, demands for civility and mutual respect will not be used to justify restricting the discussion or expression of ideas or speech that may be disagreeable or even offensive to some members of the University community. However, as outlined above, free speech is not absolute. Claims of the right to free speech do not justify speech that reasonably can be objectively interpreted as threatening the physical safety of other community members.

Free Inquiry and Academic Freedom:

The Board of Trustees affirms that a fundamental purpose of public higher education is free inquiry—the unfettered and relentless pursuit of truth—and that within the academy, free inquiry is indistinguishable from one's freedom to inquire, present, discuss, and evaluate all matters relevant to the pursuit of truth without constraint, or fear of constraint, in the performance of one's teaching, research, publishing or service obligations.

Board of Trustees

Home
Agenda Calendar
Board Meeting Calendar
Board Membership
Board of Trustees Strategic Initiatives
Committee Responsibilities and Membership
Guidelines for Board & Committee Meetings
Meeting Actions
Meeting Agendas & Materials
Meeting Minutes
Policy Manual
Student & Faculty Representatives

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Academic freedom is the freedom to present and discuss all relevant matters in and beyond the classroom, to explore all avenues of scholarship, research and creative expression, and to speak or write without any censorship, threat, restraint, or discipline by the University with regard to the pursuit of truth in the performance of one's teaching, research, publishing or service obligation.

System faculty and staff have the right to comment as employees on matters related to their professional duties, and the functioning of the University, subject to the need for courteous, professional and dignified interaction between all individuals and the parties' shared expectation that all members of the campus community will work to develop and maintain professional relationships that reflect courtesy and mutual respect, recognizing an employee's responsibility to refrain from interfering with the normal operations of the University and the ability to carry out its mission.

Employees as citizens are entitled to the rights of citizenship in their private roles as citizens, including to comment on matters of public concern outside of their employment. System employees have a responsibility and an obligation to indicate when expressing personal opinions that they are not institutional representatives unless specifically authorized as such.

Civility and Mutual Respect:

Free speech and expression and academic freedom have an important corollary: the responsibility all University community members share for maintaining an environment in which their actions are guided by mutual respect, assurance of ability to engage in civil dialogue in classrooms and university buildings and programs with integrity, and reason. These responsibilities are expressed in our constitutional freedoms: The U.S. Constitution's right of the people *peaceably* to assemble, and the Maine State Constitution's right of citizens to freely speak, write and publish, *being responsible for the abuse of these liberties*. Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest views expressed by others on campus—indeed, a guiding premise of free inquiry is that truth is more likely to be discovered if the opportunity exists for the free exchange of opposing opinions. No member of the University community may obstruct, harass, or otherwise interfere with another's freedom of speech, even if he or she disagrees with, opposes, or even loathes the other's views. In a word, our university's and Law School's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate, or deliberation may not be suppressed or disrupted 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.

Enforcement:

Each System university's administration is responsible for consistently enforcing this policy according to System-wide policies and standards, and for protecting individual rights through adequate and timely review of alleged violations. This policy shall not be construed or applied to restrict academic freedom within the University, nor to restrict constitutionally protected speech.

References

U.S. Constitution, Amendment 1

Maine State Constitution, Article 1, Section 4

[2015-2017 Agreement between UMS and AFUM, Article 2](#)

University of Chicago Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression