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# Free Speech Guide for Students

## Free Speech for Students

The First Amendment is a bedrock principle that guards American diversity of opinion and it is as important at Evergreen now as it was when we were founded in 1967. We believe vigorous debate and engagement are essential to building a better world. Evergreen's [Social Contract](#) sets guidelines for this engagement, emphasizing respect and tolerance for all, and reminding us how openness to others and their ideas helps us teach and learn.

This Free Speech Guide provides information to preserve physical safety, personal and public property, and college services and activities during free speech events on Evergreen's campuses.

## What is free speech activity?



These are activities where students can organize and convey a message. Some examples include signs and banners that are constructed of soft material; distribution of literature; silent or symbolic protest including wearing of significant clothing, gesturing, displaying a sign, or otherwise protesting noiselessly; rallies in designated public spaces such as Red Square; or picket lines. The Student Activities Office is a source for additional information and advice. When students engage in such protected activity,

representatives of the college will engage with participating students to listen, discuss or respond to the issues raised.

## What is the difference between protected speech and unprotected speech?



The law is very clear. Public colleges like Evergreen may not regulate speech or assembly based on the content of the speech. This protection means that members of the Evergreen community can engage in expressive activity on a variety of subjects, including current events or critique of the college. Expression that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, incites imminent violence, unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, falsely defames a specific individual, drowns out others engaging in protected speech, or that disrupts college operations and activities is not protected by the First Amendment.

## What about time, place and manner?



Determining the location, time and duration of your activity is important. With these details in mind, attendees can plan for their basic needs. If you would like your group to stay in a specific location, for example the designated public forum of Red Square, make that clear to attendees. The Student Activities Office can help you identify and reserve a wide range of spaces. Free expression can be exercised in appropriate open and designated public forums. Remember that offices and interiors of buildings are regulated spaces and are not considered public forums for free expression activities and not all locations on Evergreen's campuses are open for expressive activities. Some locations will not be open depending on the time (e.g. speech cannot be used to disrupt other activities and events such as classes that are in session).

## How do we respond to speech that is counter to Evergreen's values?



The First Amendment allows speech that you may find extreme or hateful. It's not unusual for people to want to silence others' speech and eliminate that which is unwelcome, disagreeable or even deeply offensive. However, it is the protection of unpopular expression that lies at the core of the First Amendment, which makes it unlawful to prohibit speech based on content. Open and vigorous contesting of ideas that people oppose is the protected response. Students who want to respond to hateful rhetoric have options. Students can counter speech with speech, hold alternative events or engage in non-violent protest. In the face of abhorrent speech, honoring free expression amplifies Evergreen's values of tolerance in the face of intolerance, inclusion and social justice.

What is a brave space?



How will you engage with those who disagree with the basis of your activity?



What is civil disobedience?



What is Evergreen's response to civil disobedience?



What are the relevant college policies and state laws?



Questions or feedback about this guide?

Contact the Dean of Students in Evans Hall Room 3009 or  
[deanofstudents@evergreen.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@evergreen.edu)

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## Lord Mansion and Coach House

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