



March 23, 2026

Robert M. Groves
Office of the President
Georgetown University
204 Healy Hall
Washington, D.C. 20057-1789

Sent via U.S. Mail and Electronic Mail (robert.groves@georgetown.edu)

Dear President Groves:

FIRE, a nonpartisan nonprofit that defends free speech,¹ is concerned by Georgetown University's statement that it is reviewing a social media post by the College Republicans group criticizing Muslims. While the post may offend some, it is unquestionably protected by Georgetown's strong and laudable commitment to free expression, which provides that it is not the university's place to protect people from speech they find offensive. We therefore urge Georgetown to immediately cease any further review or investigation of GUCR's post.

On March 8, GUCR's official X account posted, "Let's Be Honest: Muslims have no place in American society. Their religion is incompatible with our Christian Nation."² GUCR posted this as a quote response to X user Libs of TikTok's post highlighting a March 7 incident in which two men claiming affiliation with ISIS threw explosives into a crowd during an anti-Islam demonstration outside of Gracie Mansion in New York City.³ On March 10, GUCR deleted the post.⁴ In reporting on the campuswide backlash against that message, a GUCR spokesperson told *The Hoya*:⁵

We affirm the First Amendment rights of all Americans and we are called to love everyone ... Our properly articulated position is that

¹ For more than 25 years, FIRE has defended free expression and other individual rights on America's university campuses. You can learn more about our mission and activities at fire.org.

² Jacqueline Gordon, *GU Republican Chapter Deletes Post About Muslim Americans After Community Backlash*, *THE HOYA* (Mar. 11, 2026), <https://thehoya.com/news/gu-republican-chapter-deletes-post-about-muslim-americans-after-community-backlash/>. The recitation here reflects our understanding of the pertinent facts. We appreciate that you may have additional information and invite you to share it with us.

³ Libs of TikTok (@libsoftiktok), X, (Mar. 8, 2026, 2:34 PM) <https://x.com/libsoftiktok/status/2030713811867427234>; see also Brian Mann, *Two suspects charged with aiding ISIS in attempted explosives attack in New York City*, *NAT'L PUB. RADIO* (Mar. 9, 2026), <https://www.npr.org/2026/03/09/nx-s1-5742434/explosives-new-york-zohran-mamdani-isis>.

⁴ Gordon, *supra* note 2.

⁵ *Id.*

Sharia law is incompatible with Western civilization and American society as it seeks to oppress women and persecute religious minorities. This wasn't expressed in the original tweet which is why it was promptly deleted.

On March 11, Georgetown administrators issued a statement on the matter, saying: “We are reviewing this matter through established university processes, and we take our community’s concerns seriously and condemn this language, which is deeply inconsistent with Georgetown University’s values.”⁶

Georgetown boasts of its commitment “to upholding an environment for free and open inquiry.”⁷ Its Policy on Speech and Expression acknowledges that “[t]he ideas of different members of the University community will often and naturally conflict,” and that “[i]t is not the proper role of a university to insulate individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”⁸ These commitments to free speech—and a reasonable student’s interpretation of these commitments—are informed by decades of First Amendment jurisprudence and District of Columbia contract law.⁹

The Supreme Court has repeatedly, consistently, and clearly held that the free speech principles enshrined in the First Amendment protect speech others may deem offensive,¹⁰ including speech which is viewed as hateful or demeaning “on the basis of race, ethnicity, ... religion, ... or any other similar ground.”¹¹ When such expression amounts to “core political speech,” this protection is “at its zenith.”¹²

As commentary on a major religion and its influence on society and culture, particularly in the immediate wake of a terror attack undertaken in the name of that religion, GUCR’s X post unquestionably falls well within any reasonable understanding of core political speech—speech that is protected by the free speech principles reflected in Georgetown’s policies.

⁶ *Affirming Georgetown’s Commitment to Religious Diversity*, GEORGETOWN UNIV. (Mar. 11, 2026), <https://www.georgetown.edu/news/affirming-georgetowns-commitment-to-religious-diversity/> [<https://perma.cc/A2U2-48T5>].

⁷ *Policy on Speech and Expression*, GEORGETOWN UNIV. (last visited Mar. 20, 2026), <https://www.georgetown.edu/speech-and-expression/policy/> [<https://perma.cc/4T8Z-UBCL>].

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ See *Chenari v. George Wash. Univ.*, 847 F.3d 740, 744 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (“Under District of Columbia law, which governs here, ‘the relationship between a university and its students is contractual in nature.’”); *Iyer v. George Wash. Univ. Sch. of Medicine*, No. 24-130, 2025 WL 2192985, at *4 (D.D.C. Aug. 1, 2025) (“the Student Handbook ... would form the basis for the breach-of-contract claim”); see also *Healy v. James*, 408 U.S. 169, 180 (1972) (“[T]he precedents of this Court leave no room for the view that, because of the acknowledged need for order, First Amendment protections should apply with less force on college campuses than in the community at large.”)

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397, 414 (1989) (burning the American flag is protected by First Amendment, the “bedrock principle underlying” the holding being that government actors “may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable”).

¹¹ *Matal v. Tam*, 582 U.S. 218, 246 (2017); see also *Am. Freedom Def. Initiative v. Wash. Metro. Area Transit Auth.*, 898 F.Supp.2d 73, 79, 83 (D.D.C. 2012) (a subway advertisement calling Muslims “savages” was protected speech).

¹² *Buckley v. Am. Const. Law Found.*, 525 U.S. 182, 183 (1999) (quoting *Meyer v. Grant*, 486 U.S. 414, 422 (1988)).

GUCR's clarified position that "Sharia law is incompatible with Western civilization and American society as it seeks to oppress women and persecute religious minorities,"¹³ is similarly core political speech, as it touches on global humanitarian issues and an ongoing American political debate.¹⁴ Georgetown's free expression promises are entirely meaningless if they do not protect students or groups from being investigated or punished for such commentary.¹⁵ That any sort of "review" was even announced poses an impermissible chilling effect foreclosed by the university's policies.¹⁶

Of course, none of this shields GUCR or its members from criticism by students, faculty, and the broader community. Criticism is a form of "more speech," the remedy to offensive expression that the First Amendment prefers to censorship.¹⁷ And in this case, it is clear that such criticism was effective, as GUCR removed its post and issued a modified statement. It is hard to imagine a clearer illustration of the wisdom and efficacy of the stated principles of Georgetown and First Amendment jurisprudence.

Lastly, although Georgetown may institutionally condemn GUCR's X post,¹⁸ we urge you to consider adopting a position of institutional neutrality on political and social questions unrelated to university governance. As articulated in the University of Chicago's 1967 Kalven Report, a commitment to neutrality allows a university to fulfill its primary mission of generating and disseminating knowledge by welcoming the fullest range of views.¹⁹ By maintaining a principled position of neutrality, a university will confront fewer demands to censor particular voices or respond to every controversy. The university, according to the Kalven Report, "is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic."²⁰ Rather, it is faculty and students who are the "instrument of dissent and criticism."²¹ We would be happy

¹³ Gordon, *supra* note 2.

¹⁴ For example, Republicans in the U.S. House Judiciary Committee had a hearing last month called "Sharia-Free America," which was part of a burgeoning "Sharia-Free Caucus." House Judiciary GOP, *Sharia-Free America: Why Political Islam & Sharia Law Are Incompatible with the U.S. Constitution*, YOUTUBE, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbDNzhnV8h4>; see also Emily Kennard and Violet Jira, *House Republicans' 'Sharia Free America' Caucus Is Surging*, NOTUS (Mar. 19, 2026), <https://www.notus.org/congress/house-republicans-sharia-free-america-caucus-is-surgin>.

¹⁵ See *Policy on Speech and Expression*, *supra* note 7 (delineating "narrow exceptions" to its free speech policy, which largely mirrors those of First Amendment jurisprudence). The policies do not enable Georgetown to investigate students or student groups for speech merely because it offends or is "deeply inconsistent with Georgetown University's values."

¹⁶ Even if no formal punishment is meted out, the question is not whether formal punishment is imposed, but whether the institution's actions "would chill or silence a person of ordinary firmness from future First Amendment activities." *Mendocino Env't. Ctr. v. Mendocino Cnty.*, 192 F.3d 1283, 1300 (9th Cir. 1999) (internal quotations omitted); see also *Levin v. Harleston*, 966 F.2d 85, 89–90 (2d Cir. 1992).

¹⁷ *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357, 377 (1927) (Brandeis, J., concurring).

¹⁸ Under the First Amendment, government actors may express a viewpoint so long as its expression does not unconstitutionally affect private speakers' protected speech by, for instance, chilling private speakers' expression. *Walker v. Tex. Div., Sons of Confederate Veterans, Inc.*, 576 U.S. 200, 207–08 (2015).

¹⁹ See Kalven Committee, *Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action*, UNIV. OF CHI. (1967), <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/report-universitys-role-political-and-social-action-kalven-report>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

to work with Georgetown on adopting institutional neutrality to avoid further controversies and make the campus free expression climate more hospitable.

We request a substantive response to this letter no later than the close of business on April 6, confirming that Georgetown will promptly end its review of GUCR's protected expression and refrain from imposing any disciplinary sanctions on the group.

Sincerely,



Garrett Gravley
Program Counsel, Campus Rights Advocacy

Cc: Eleanor JB Daugherty, Vice President for Student Affairs
Rosemary Kilkenny, Vice President for Institutional Diversity and Equity