

# Statement on Freedom of Expression

## Date

1/21

The University of Southern Indiana considers freedom of inquiry and discussion essential to a student's educational development. Through open discussion of ideas and exchange of opinions, one can become informed and can test and give expression to values as they relate to issues concerning oneself and society.

The ideas of different members of the University 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 deeply offensive. Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University 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 closing off 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. The University may restrict expression that violates the law, constitutes a false and defamatory communication against a specific individual, constitutes a genuine threat of unlawful harassment, 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 a completely free and open discussion of ideas.

In a word, the University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate and 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 University 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 University 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'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 University 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 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.

*Much of this statement was originally drafted and adopted by the University of Chicago.*

## Free Speech, Peaceful Dissent, Protests and Demonstrations Rights and Responsibilities

In accordance with the University of Southern Indiana's obligation to promote the free expression of all views, the campus is open to any speaker whom University student organizations, administrators, staff, or faculty members have invited and for whom official arrangements to speak have been made with the University.

The right of free speech at the University also includes the right of individuals and groups affiliated with the University and members of the public not affiliated with the University to participate in acts of peaceful dissent, protests in

peaceable assembly and orderly demonstrations on the USI campus. However, the University may regulate the time, place and manner in order to prevent unreasonable interference or disruption of the University's educational, research, outreach and business functions, normal or scheduled uses of University property by the campus community, as well as protecting public health, safety and welfare.

All individuals and groups affiliated with the University and planning to engage in dissent, protest, petitioning or demonstration activities of the sort described in the previous paragraph should contact the Dean of Students Office for details and to reserve space at least 24-business hours in advance. This allows the University the opportunity to provide space that accommodates the reasonable needs of both those engaged in dissent, protest, petitioning or demonstration activities and the University community. Members of the public not affiliated with the University must register with the Dean of Students Office prior to engaging in dissent, protest, petitioning or demonstration activities on the USI campus.

The following locations on the USI campus accommodate the reasonable needs of the University and are available for dissent, protest, petitioning or demonstration activities by members of the public, individuals and groups affiliated with USI and guests:

- the lawn area south of Rice Library
- the lawn to the north of the Wright Administration building
- the lawn in the northwest corner of the quad

In addition, other areas of the University campus may be utilized for dissent, protest, or demonstration activities if they meet the following general conditions of use:

- Activities may not be conducted in a manner that violates any federal, state or local law.
- Activities may not be conducted in a manner at a time or in a place that is either incompatible with or unreasonably interferes with the educational, research, business or other legitimate functions of the University.
- Activities may not be conducted in a manner that violates the rules, regulations, or policies of the University of Southern Indiana including *Student Rights and Responsibilities: A Code of Student Behavior* (Sections 1.2 C. 10 and C.11).
- Activities may not be conducted in a manner that violates applicable fire or safety regulations.
- Activities may not disrupt academic activity, block egress (i.e. block safe access to exits and entrances, hallways, sidewalks, streets etc.) or pose a threat to the personal safety of community members.

Violations of these policies may result in removal from a location on the USI campus, appropriate disciplinary action, and/or arrest, in accordance with applicable law and University policies and procedures.

The University of Southern Indiana, as a public institution, does not endorse or take any position on or action against individuals or groups engaged in dissent, protest, or demonstration activities based on the content of their message.