

Faculty Statement on Freedom of Expression

Because Franklin & Marshall College is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the College community the broadest possible latitude to express themselves freely and to challenge the views of others. The Faculty vigorously values the creation and maintenance of a climate in which all members of the community are welcomed and are encouraged to participate in the free expression of ideas. Inasmuch as the spark of truth often comes forth only after the clash of differing opinions, we view freedom of expression as highly valuable because it encourages multiple opinions, allows them to coalesce and/or clash, and opens them to the community's reflections.

Indeed, fostering the capacity of the College community to engage in critical discourse and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the College's educational mission. Of course, the ideas of different members of the College community will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of the College to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Although the College greatly values civility, and although all members of the College 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. We have obligations to protect the dignity and security of all members of the college community from those who would seek to use speech primarily to deprive others of their freedom to learn, their freedom to contribute, and their freedom to participate in our community. Thus, the College may restrict expression that violates state or federal law, that constitutes slander, threats, or harassment, or that is directly incompatible with the functioning of the College (e.g., expression that violates privacy or confidentiality interests). In addition, the College may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the College (see Section VII.H). 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 College's commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.

In short, the College's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because of the ideas put forth. We support a climate of inclusiveness in which all members are encouraged to vigorously contest the ideas and the speech that they oppose. Moreover, in order to foster the climate of inclusiveness that is most conducive to freedom of expression in the pursuit of knowledge, the Faculty is committed to the following:

- I. Sustaining a diverse community of students, faculty, and staff in which all are welcomed and are encouraged to participate in the free expression of ideas.
- II. Condemning behavior and speech whose demonstrable intent is to demean, harass, or limit the sense of security and belonging of any member of the College community as they participate in the pursuit of knowledge.

(This resolution is adapted and excerpted from the 2015 University of Chicago Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression. The original is available in full at <http://provost.uchicago.edu/FOECommitteeReport.pdf>)