

Policy Title: Community, Diversity and Freedom of Expression

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Resources and Related University Policies:

COMMUNITY, DIVERSITY, AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Statement of Principles

Drake University's purpose is to transmit knowledge, pursue truth, and encourage the intellectual and moral development of its students through the activities central to academic life: teaching, research, rigorous analysis, debate, study, and service. In pursuit of these goals, Drake encourages and protects diverse perspectives and the free flow of ideas and discussion among its members. Such diversity and differences of opinion generate debate that produce knowledge and a greater understanding of what it means to be fully human.

Drake values the fact that it is a community consisting of men and women of different races, nationalities, religions, physical abilities, sexual orientation, ages, political perspectives and other diverse characteristics. While acknowledging our differences, we affirm the dignity and freedom of every individual. We abhor acts of oppression, be they denial of freedom of expression; discrimination in its various forms of sexism or racism, or intolerance of religion, age, sexual orientation, or political beliefs; or harassment of any member of the University community.

Drake's students, faculty, and staff share the responsibility of respect for each other and for new and opposing ideas. We seek affirmatively to cherish and celebrate difference. We intend that our purpose and commitment to community pervade our campus — our classrooms, libraries, offices, social and academic organizations, studios, recreational facilities, living units — buoyed by freedom, responsibility, and respect for all people. It is education in the most humane and liberating sense to which Drake is dedicated. Drake University upholds freedom of thought and freedom of expression as central to its educational mission.

Drake therefore carefully refrains from restricting the exchange of ideas or regulating the content of speech. We realize that freedom of thought and freedom of expression produce conflict and challenge. We encourage civil debate and discussion of divergent perspectives and opinions in a manner that affirms our community. We seek to create a community in which shared purpose transcends difference and respect for human dignity transcends conflict.

The encouragement of civility does not, however, mean that Drake seeks to avoid public debate or suppress open and candid discussion of troubling and controversial issues. Nor do we seek to discourage or chill the expression of unpopular opinions or challenging perspectives. To preserve the University's central role as a public forum of ideas, Drake upholds the right to express unpopular and provocative viewpoints, including expression that may be dramatic, emotive, or imperfectly articulated. We affirm the principle that thoughts and opinions should be subject to the crucible of debate and be judged only in the free marketplace of ideas. Ideas will not be suppressed because they are presently viewed as unpopular or inappropriate by current authorities, nor will expression of those ideas be infringed because it may be perceived as harmful to a particular group or organization. Although the frank and open discussion of social, cultural, artistic, religious, moral, scientific and political issues may be disturbing and even hurtful for some individuals, the principle of free exchange and inquiry takes precedence as it is so fundamental to the educational enterprise.

While cherishing and defending freedom of speech to the full extent protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, Drake University declares its abhorrence of statements that demean, denigrate, humiliate or express hatred toward members of the university community. Words do indeed have consequences. Words may be hurtful. Speech should be a thoughtful process. Speaking irresponsibly can negatively affect morale, motivation, and community. Responsibility calls us to be sensitive to the harmful effects of hostile speech and to refrain from speaking in demeaning and discriminatory ways.

Any individual who uses bigoted or vicious speech and thereby betrays the ideal of mutual respect and goodwill toward all members of the University community may expect strong and public censure by the administration, faculty and students. Even if expression that is hostile in nature does not rise to the level of harassment which is subject to disciplinary sanction, no person is ever exempt from being reprovved by the administration or from being chastised by fellow students, faculty, or staff. To rebuke a speaker for the error of his or her ideas or for the odious nature of their expression is part of the robust and vigorous public debate which is the central purpose of the University. Indeed, every member of the Drake University community has a responsibility to promote civility and mutual respect for every other individual and to thoughtfully challenge those who undermine our community.

Moreover, while the University defends freedom of expression, it will not tolerate acts of harassment. When an individual engages in harmful conduct or threatens a member of or a visitor to the University community, Drake University will take such disciplinary action and respond with such sanctions as are deemed appropriate.