

POLICIES & GUIDELINES

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GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS IN SUPPORT OF FREE EXPRESSION THROUGH PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

Johns Hopkins University seeks to uphold and protect the right of free expression and presents these guidelines to aid students seeking to engage in protests, demonstrations, vigils, displays, or other acts of public expression.

These guidelines emerge from our commitment to academic freedom as a fundamental value of the university, articulated in our [Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom](#) [↗](#). Academic freedom depends on free expression and requires a commitment to maintaining a climate that fuels the discovery and dissemination of ideas through speech, reason, and debate.

Accordingly, these guidelines are designed to support the right to engage in acts of public expression and the right of an audience to receive that expression. Any negative short-term effects of airing controversial views—provided those views are expressed in ways that do not threaten, incite violence, or raise demonstrable health or safety concerns—are outweighed by the long-term benefits to our community of a robust exchange of ideas.

General Guidelines

The university strives to actively support and promote acts of public expression on campus.

Students interested in organizing or engaging in protests, demonstrations, or other acts of public expression may, but are not required to, seek support from Leadership Engagement & Experiential Development (LEED) or the appropriate school-based student affairs office, and Public Safety. Advance notice is not intended as a precursor to restraint of speech but rather as an opportunity to ensure that an event is fully supported by university resources and in alignment with university policies and guidelines.

In working to support free speech and expression, the university is also protective of the health and safety of all members of our community (students, faculty, and staff). We are committed to establishing a safe environment in which free speech and expression can take place by:

1. ensuring the physical health and safety of our community;
2. prohibiting threats, discrimination, harassment, or intimidation directed at a specific person or group, including actions based on race, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, disability, age, or other protected status; and
3. prohibiting the incitement of violence.

Protests, demonstrations, and other acts of public expression generally will be permitted and supported until or unless the university determines that the activity is in violation of university policy, that the rights of others have been significantly infringed, and/or that there is a threat to the health, safety, or welfare of others, including those in attendance. Material interference with the rights of others to engage in instruction, research, studying, or taking exams will be viewed as inhibiting the academic freedom of others and disruptive to the core educational mission of the university.

Impermissible disruptions include, but are not limited to, obstructing the passage into or out of buildings by blocking doorways; preventing university employees from entering their workplace; refusing to relocate from a building or area that is closed; preventing members of a class from being able to hear a lecture or take an exam; preventing a speaker from giving a lecture, talk, presentation, or performance by means of shouts or other significant interruptions; and destruction of property or vandalism.

Additional Information

Arrangements

Under existing policies, arrangements are generally required for recognized student organizations seeking to use common spaces (such as lecture halls and outdoor spaces). The university's [online event scheduling form](#) makes this easy.

While arrangements are not required for student protests and demonstrations, they can help make the event effective by ensuring a space is not already reserved for another group, proactively ensuring the health and safety of participants and the university community, and allowing public expression to proceed without interfering with the mission of the university.

Students are encouraged to review the Student Conduct Code and the materials on the [Protests and Demonstrations webpage](#) when planning a protest, demonstration, vigil, display, or other act of public expression.

These guidelines are focused on events that take place on campus. For events occurring on city sidewalks and streets adjacent to the university, students should make appropriate arrangements to acquire city permits and should adhere to city ordinances and applicable state and federal law.

Placards, Banners, and Signs

Placards, banners, and signs may be carried during a protest or demonstration so long as they are not dangerous to others and do not significantly impede the participation of others in usual university activities and operations, and otherwise adhere to university policies. If the use of placards, banners, or signs is dangerous or significantly impedes the participation of others, university officials may require adjustment, removal, or relocation of the materials.

Counter-Protests

Protests, demonstrations, or other acts of free expression on campus may prompt a counterprotest or other forms of expression. When these arise, the expression of all parties is important and will be supported in accordance with these guidelines. On occasion, a separate protest area may be designated by the university for those seeking to express views that differ from those expressed by the event organizers, in order to ensure that all views can be expressed.

Guests

Students may invite guests—i.e., those individuals or groups not formally affiliated with the university—to join in acts of public expression on campus, but students are responsible for informing their guests of university guidelines and policies and are accountable for the actions of their guests in accordance with university policies. In addition, those participating in protests, demonstrations, or other acts of public expression on Johns Hopkins University campuses may be required to provide identification. Uninvited guests or others who have no direct affiliation with the university are not covered by the same rights of access, demonstration, or other activity.

Related Policies

Related policies and guidelines include:

- [Student Conduct Code](#)
- [Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#)
- [Event Promotion \(Posting/Flyers, Chalking, Banners\)](#)
- [Jay the Blue Jay Statue: Guidelines for Use](#)
- [Open Space Policies](#)
- [Campus Ground Use Guidelines](#)
- [Fire Prevention Policy](#)
- [Means of Egress Policy](#)
- [Access to Restricted Areas Policy](#)
- [Event Planning Guide](#)

Effective September 10, 2024

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