

Communications

Freedom of Expression, Political Activity, Discriminatory Speech, and Academic Freedom ▾

Freedom of Expression, Political Activity, Discriminatory Speech, and Academic Freedom

This section of the College Handbook addresses core values of the institution with regard to the free expression of ideas, a central pillar of education. It outlines the institution's policies on free expression in terms of: demonstrations, issues related to political activity, and the distinction between the value of free expression and the abuse of that freedom through discriminatory, intentionally hurtful speech. Finally, the section highlights Carleton's commitment to academic freedom.

Freedom of Expression

A. Demonstrations

Support of any cause by demonstration or other orderly means, including picketing and other forms of peaceful protest, is permitted on College premises so long as it does not disrupt the operation of the College; jeopardize its legal status; interfere with entrances to and exits from College facilities; interrupt classes; interfere with other normal day-to-day activities of the College; cause damage to property; or threaten or endanger the health, wellbeing, or safety of oneself or any person on College property^[1].

The College may call upon local law enforcement bodies to remedy violations covered by this paragraph. In addition, the College may choose to impose its own disciplinary sanctions. Disciplinary measures for such violations will be handled in consultation with the President of the College by the respective vice president: the Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students for students; the Vice President and Treasurer for staff members; and the Provost for matters related to the faculty.

B. Free expression in scheduled learning spaces (See also [Academic Freedom \(https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/faculty-appointments/?a=faculty&policy=150\)](https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/faculty-appointments/?a=faculty&policy=150))

Discussion and expression of all views relevant to the subject matter are permitted in the classroom, subject only to the responsibility of the instructors to their course. It is expected that they will exercise that responsibility with reason and restraint and within the confines of academic freedom for students and faculty alike.

C. Campus Events

Students, groups, and campus organizations may invite and hear any person of their own choosing, subject only to the requirements for [the use of College facilities \(https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/community/?a=student&policy=239\)](https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/community/?a=student&policy=239).

No individual or group may prevent or attempt to prevent a student from interviewing on campus with any graduate or professional school or other legal employer desiring to recruit at the College.

D. Political Activity

College employees are entitled to freely participate in political activity around an election process when not acting as an agent of or fulfilling professional responsibilities to the College. However, the College, due to its tax-exempt status, is prohibited from engaging in certain types of political activity. It is particularly important that we are thoughtful about these issues during an election season. The ramifications of engaging in prohibited election activity include loss of the College's tax-exempt status. *Please note that this policy does not apply to established student groups, such as the College Democrats and Republicans, who may use institutional facilities for partisan political purposes.*

Whether an educational institution has engaged in prohibited political activity depends on all of the particular facts and circumstances. For example, while it has been considered permissible to sponsor a forum to educate voters, no preference for or against a particular candidate may be shown by the College. Candidates may speak on campus so long as all legally qualified candidates are provided access on an equal basis. Non-partisan voter registration drives have also been deemed acceptable.

Employees may not use College resources, including e-mail, computers, telephones, fax, or photocopying equipment, to work for or endorse a candidate, political party, or political action committee. The College may not "participate" or "intervene" in a campaign of any candidate for

public office; endorse, expressly or implicitly, a candidate for public office; sponsor events to advance the candidacy of a particular candidate; invite employees to candidate events; publish ratings of candidates; or comment on actions, statements, or positions taken by candidates.

Again, utilization of Carleton resources is prohibited, as are public statements by officials where there is a risk that the statement could be attributed to the College.

The IRS has released guidance to tax exempt organizations regarding the facts and circumstances it considers when deciding whether a charitable organization has engaged in prohibited political activity in Revenue Ruling 2007-41 (<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/rr-07-41.pdf>).

If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, please contact the Office of the Vice President and Treasurer.

E. Discriminatory speech^[2]

As noted above, Carleton College is committed to the principle of free expression and exploration of ideas in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect. The College therefore also embraces the related principle that all members of its community shall have access to its educational facilities, activities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, ethnicity, religion, sex, national origin, marital status, veteran status, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, status with regard to public assistance, disability, or age. These principles guide the College's relationships with individuals and should guide the interactions of all members of the community.

While the nature of an academic community is to provide a milieu for the expression, criticism and discussion (and for the tolerance) of the widest range of opinions, it does not provide a license for bigotry in the form of demeaning, discriminatory speech or actions. Thus, the presentation of a reasoned or evidenced claim about a societal group that offends members of that group is to be distinguished from a gratuitous denigrating claim about, or addressed to, an individual or group such as those enumerated above. The former is *bona fide* academic behavior while the latter may demean, degrade or victimize in a discriminatory manner and, if so, undermines the above principles.

A possible breach of the foregoing principles may be reported through the Community Concern Form (<https://www.carleton.edu/dean-of-students/forms/community-concern/>) or brought to the attention of the appropriate College office: the Dean of Students Office, the Office of the Vice President and Treasurer, or the Provost's Office, if the party responsible is, respectively, a student, a staff member, or a faculty member. Any member of the community may also bring a concern to the Vice President for Inclusion, Equity, and Community. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act,

which protects people from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, the College has a responsibility to investigate any concern.

Discriminatory speech and actions are especially abhorrent when they are made anonymously, for anonymity precludes the possibility of an exchange and exploration of ideas; moreover, such an anonymous message by the very nature of its delivery is a threat to the recipient. Discrimination by one person against another is also particularly abhorrent when the first person is in a position of power with respect to the second, whether in the academic, administrative, political, or social hierarchy on the campus.

Although this policy attempts to eliminate certain behavior and actions on the campus, Carleton cannot guarantee that the environment will always be comfortable for all the members of the community. Often, the educational process is disturbing and unsettling; when one's ideas are under attack and one's values are being challenged, the effect may be simultaneously painful and highly educational. Thus, behavior that is disturbing or unsettling to an individual or group is not necessarily discriminatory. In this regard, it is imperative that faculty and students be able to take controversial positions without fear, in accordance with the principle of academic freedom.

Students, faculty, and staff of Carleton College are asked to support this anti-discrimination policy through participation in discussions about it. The College will facilitate this by providing educational opportunities and forums for such discussions to take place and by making it possible for students, faculty, and staff to attend them. The College will actively encourage the discussion of issues raised by the policy in appropriate classes, meetings, symposia, and college publications.

F. Academic Freedom

Carleton College fully supports the principles of Academic Freedom. Please see the "[Statement on Academic Freedom](https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/faculty-appointments/?a=faculty&policy=150)" (<https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/faculty-appointments/?a=faculty&policy=150>) in the Faculty Handbook under "Appointments and Tenure" and the [Community Standards Policy](https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/community/?a=student&policy=239) (i.D. Academic Freedom) (<https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/community/?a=student&policy=239>).

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1. This language is consistent with language in [Community Standards](https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/community/?policy=239) (<https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/community/?policy=239>): See II. Student Conduct: Expectations, Rules, and Regulations.
 2. See also the [College's statement of non-discrimination](https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/governance/?policy=306) (<https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/governance/?policy=306>) and the [Procedures for](#)

Investigating Reports of Discrimination or Harassment

(<https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/health-safety/?policy=66>).

Last Revised: April 14, 2025

Adopted by the Board of Trustees May 10, 2025, upon recommendation of the College Council.

For: [Faculty \(/handbook/communications/policy/325/freedom-of-expression-political-activity-discriminatory-speech-and-academic-freedom/?a=faculty\)](/handbook/communications/policy/325/freedom-of-expression-political-activity-discriminatory-speech-and-academic-freedom/?a=faculty), [Staff \(/handbook/communications/policy/325/freedom-of-expression-political-activity-discriminatory-speech-and-academic-freedom/?a=staff\)](/handbook/communications/policy/325/freedom-of-expression-political-activity-discriminatory-speech-and-academic-freedom/?a=staff), [Students \(/handbook/communications/policy/325/freedom-of-expression-political-activity-discriminatory-speech-and-academic-freedom/?a=student\)](/handbook/communications/policy/325/freedom-of-expression-political-activity-discriminatory-speech-and-academic-freedom/?a=student)

Last Reviewed: October 24, 2025

Maintained by: President's Office

Previous: [E-mail as Official Communication for Students](https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/communications/policy/268/e-mail-as-official-communication-for-students/?a=student)

(<https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/communications/policy/268/e-mail-as-official-communication-for-students/?a=student>)

Next: [Release of Constituent/Alumni Information](https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/communications/policy/211/release-of-constituent-alumni-information/?a=student)

(<https://www.carleton.edu/handbook/communications/policy/211/release-of-constituent-alumni-information/?a=student>)

List all Policies & Guidelines for Communications (</handbook/communications/policy/325/freedom-of-expression-political-activity-discriminatory-speech-and-academic-freedom/?a=student>)

Campus Handbook

The Campus Handbook is the one place to find all official Carleton College policies and guidelines. It contains the [Student](/handbook/?a=student) (</handbook/?a=student>), [Faculty](/handbook/?a=faculty) (</handbook/?a=faculty>), and [Staff](/handbook/?a=staff) (</handbook/?a=staff>) handbooks. These policies and guidelines are subject to change.

[Campus Handbook Archive](/handbook/archive/)

[\(/handbook/archive/\)](/handbook/archive/)

[Tools for Policy/Guideline](#)

[Maintainers](#)

[\(/handbook/maintainers/\)](/handbook/maintainers/)

Email: campus-handbook.group@carleton.edu
(<mailto:campus-handbook.group@carleton.edu>)

Campus Handbook pages maintained by the [Web Team](#) (<mailto:web@carleton.edu>)

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