

Freedom of Expression

POLICY TITLE:	Carnegie Mellon University Policy on Freedom of Expression
DATE OF ISSUANCE:	This Policy was originally adopted on March 3, 1988, as <i>Free Speech and Assembly and Controversial Speakers</i> . It was amended in February 2007 and in September 2017. Following extensive study and review by the university's Commission on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, the most recent revision was approved on May 30, 2025.
ACCOUNTABLE DEPARTMENT/UNIT:	Office of the Provost and Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. Questions on Policy content should be directed either to the Provost (412-268-3260) or to the Vice President, Office of Student Affairs (412-268-2075).
ABSTRACT:	Protection of Freedom of Expression at the University
RELATED DOCUMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freedom of Expression GuidanceRequirements and Procedures for Scheduling and Safely Hosting On-Campus Events Involving Expressive Activity^[1]

Policy Statement

Carnegie Mellon University values the freedoms of speech, thought, expression and assembly — in themselves and as part of our core educational and intellectual mission. If individuals are to cherish freedom, they must experience it. The very concept of freedom assumes that people usually choose wisely from a range of available ideas and that the range and implications of ideas cannot be fully understood unless we hold vital our rights to know, to express, and to choose. The university must be a place where all ideas may be expressed freely and where no alternative is withheld from consideration. The only limits on these freedoms are those dictated by law and those necessary to protect the rights of other members of the university community and to ensure the normal functioning of the university.

At the university, restrictions on expression are narrowly construed and content-neutral in their application. Expression of even unpopular or challenging opinions is typically protected, although protection of speech is not absolute, and some forms of speech, particularly those which would not be protected by the First Amendment if the university were a public institution, may be restricted. As provided by applicable law, the university has the right to impose reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions on the exercise of speech and assembly, which the university has done, and reserves the right to continue to do. Further, faculty, staff, students and other members of the university community whose conduct is found to have violated university policy, even when such conduct may have taken the form of speech or expression, are subject to conduct review.^[2]

Standards for faculty at Carnegie Mellon pertaining to academic freedom and responsibility are set forth in the Appointment and Tenure Policy.

For additional details on interpretation of this Policy, including the application of time, place and manner standards as well as clarifications related to Academic Freedom as recommended by the university's Commission on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression, please reference the Guidance on Freedom of Expression and the Procedures for Scheduling and Safely Hosting On-Campus Events Involving Expressive Activity.

Rights

On Carnegie Mellon's campus, faculty, staff, and students of the university may distribute printed material,^[3] offer petitions for signature, make speeches and hold protests or demonstrations outside university buildings.^[4] Members of the campus community have a right to hear, see, and experience diverse intellectual and creative inquiry, whether from speakers from within our own community or from guest speakers invited by a recognized campus organization. Defending that right to hear, see and experience such expression is a fundamental obligation of the university. Controversy cannot be permitted to abridge the freedoms of speech, thought, expression or assembly. They are not matters of convenience, but of necessity.

All activities under this Policy must be peaceful, avoiding acts or credible threats of physical violence and preserving the normal operation of the university. No event will be permitted to harm others, damage or deface property, block access to university buildings or disrupt classes or operations of any university program or activity. These conditions are content neutral in their application to any message or sponsorship of the act or event.

Additional details regarding the event notice process are available in the Procedures for Scheduling and Safely Hosting On-Campus Events Involving Expressive Activity.

Responsibilities

Freedom of expression must be at once fiercely guarded and genuinely embraced. Those who exercise it serve the Carnegie Mellon community by accepting the responsibilities attendant to free expression. University organizations that sponsor invited guests to campus are expected to uphold Carnegie Mellon's educational mission by planning carefully to create safe and thoughtful experiences for those involved. Hosts are responsible for the behavior of their guests and should exercise due care to ensure that all participants abide by relevant university policies.

Endnotes

[1] The Procedures for Registering and Safely Hosting On-Campus Events involving Expressive Activity were developed in 2024 following consultation with leadership of the Faculty Senate, the Staff Council, and representatives from the executive committees of the Graduate Student Assembly and the Undergraduate Student Senate. Any future changes to these Procedures being considered by university leadership would be subject to consultation with those groups.

[2] For example, disciplinary action may be taken for speech that violates the university's Statement Assurance (regarding harassment and discrimination), the Sexual Misconduct Policy, the Code of Business Ethics and Conduct (with respect to respectful and professional conduct in the workplace), the Staff Handbook, community standards published in The Word Student Handbook, and the provisions of the Appointment and Tenure policy regarding misuse of authority to harass.

[3] The distribution of printed materials does not include the hanging of posters and other matters covered by the Advertising on Campus - Graffiti and Poster Policy or relevant individual department policies. Posters and other expression placed on university property that are not compliant with the Poster Policy and/or do not have the express permission of the department that controls the space may be removed by the university and may be subject to university policies and/or applicable law regarding graffiti and vandalism.

[4] Individuals and organizations who are not Carnegie Mellon students, faculty, or staff who wish to distribute printed material, offer petitions for signature, make speeches or hold protests or demonstrations outside university buildings, are required to have a university sponsor from a current member of the university community. For more information about events or activities that require advance notice, see Procedures for Scheduling and Safely Hosting On-Campus Events Involving Expressive Activity.

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