

A.5. Policy on Open Expression

Middlebury is a community of learners that dedicates itself to creating a world with a robust and inclusive public sphere, including on our campuses. A robust and inclusive public sphere is one where all voices can be heard and have the opportunity to contribute to the conversation. Middlebury's mission is to prepare students to lead engaged, consequential, and creative lives, to contribute to their communities, and to address the world's most challenging problems. This mission requires a learning environment where all community members practice engaging across difference, perspective taking, and critical thinking to expand their understanding of the range of attitudes, values, ideas, actions, issues, policies, and practices that exist on campus and in the world beyond. Learning occurs inside and outside the classroom, often involving public speech and action through which people affirm and enact their values.

Academic freedom is essential to Middlebury's mission and freedom of expression is a vital component of academic freedom. Campus community members engaging in open expression—and in response to the expression of others—are expected to do so in a way that affirms our three pillars of academic freedom, integrity, and respect. Protecting open expression does not mean that Middlebury approves of or endorses all views expressed, especially where the expression conflicts with our fundamental commitment to inclusivity – that the contributions of every community member are valued. Moreover, there are legal limits on the range of expression permitted. Speech that incites or threatens physical violence, speech that is defamatory, and forms of expression that violate our Anti-Harassment/Discrimination policy, are inconsistent with our educational mission and our shared community values. We recognize that open expression can result in hurt and harm to members of our community and our sense of shared purpose, and we continue to dedicate ourselves to making Middlebury a more inclusive community.

Campus community members planning to invite an outside speaker must review and follow the [Policy on Scheduling Middlebury Space for Events](#) and are responsible for communicating Middlebury's expectations to invited guests.

Peaceful protest and demonstration are important forms of activism

Middlebury recognizes the historical importance of nonviolent public demonstration and protest. Activism enables community members to publicly display their concerns, their values and their aspirations. Middlebury supports the expression of one's own ideas and the response to others' ideas. We affirm the right to assemble peacefully to evince dissent and to call on others to take action.

Community members can engage in non-disruptive protest and demonstration

All members of the campus community can engage in personal activity involving protest and demonstration to express one's own ideas.

Conduct Standards

Speech that incites or threatens physical violence, speech that is defamatory, and forms of expression that violate our Anti-Harassment/Discrimination Policy, are prohibited and subject to discipline and sanction in accordance with the appropriate Handbook procedures.

Middlebury does not permit actions that prevent the speech of others, block the passage of persons or vehicles, cause property damage, threaten campus or personal safety, or result in physical harm to individuals. Such actions will be subject to discipline and sanction in accordance with the appropriate handbook procedures.

Middlebury does not permit substantial disruption to campus events, activities and operations. Individuals engaged in substantially disruptive behaviors will generally be warned once and then be subject to disciplinary sanctions for such behaviors. An extended period of substantially disruptive behavior may result in dispersal of the group or activity as well as more serious disciplinary consequences for participants.

Violations of state or federal laws (for example, violence or trespassing after being warned) may result in arrest and/or criminal charges by law enforcement officers through a criminal process.

Middlebury faculty, staff, and students may not claim or appear to represent the views of the institution nor make significant use of Middlebury resources to support their personal expression.

Related Policies and Documents:

1. [Demonstration Regulations](#)
2. [Policy on Scheduling Middlebury Events](#)
3. [Frequently Asked Questions about Open Expression](#)
4. [Open Expression Resources Page](#)

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