

Freedom of Expression (<https://www.bsu.edu/about/freedom-of-expression>)

Freedom of Expression Statement

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1.1. Freedom of expression is enshrined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and Ball State University's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. Therefore, Ball State University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, and our University guarantees all members of the University community—including students, faculty, staff, and visitors—the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of our University, Ball State fully respects and supports freedom of expression of all members of the University community. Our University endeavors to maintain a culture and community that will inspire our members to pursue knowledge with rigor and curiosity, to speak with care, and to work so that the perspectives of all people are heard. In the Beneficence Pledge, members of the Ball State community pledge to value the intrinsic worth of every member of the community, which is to respect and learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions.

1.2 The ideas of different members of the University community will often and quite naturally conflict. It is not the proper role of our University, however, to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Our University greatly values civility, and all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect. But concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, irrespective of how offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

1.3 The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not, though, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. Our University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the University. In addition, our University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of our University. But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with our University's commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.

1.4 Simply put, our University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for our University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose. Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of our University's educational mission.

1.5 As a corollary to our University's commitment to protect and promote free expression, members of the University community must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression. Members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus. But they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe. To this end, our University has an enduring responsibility to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation and to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.

1.6 Ball State University is committed to the right of individuals to speak and to identify as a member of the University. However, that right exists with a concurrent obligation not to speak or act on behalf of the institution, or any group of members therein, without express authorization. To clarify, a group includes a university division, college, department, unit, center, taskforce or committee. Of course, nothing in the above referenced statement is intended to restrict the freedom of employees to engage in scholarly activities or personal involvement in community activities. Nor is the statement intended to affect individual employees' rights to express personal opinions on University or non-University matters, as long as those employees make it clear that they do so as individuals and do not represent the official position of the University either directly or indirectly. For purposes of clarity, the President speaks for the University on matters related to the business, operations, events of the University, and as delegated to the President by the Board of Trustees or as expressly authorized by the Board of Trustees. Individuals, task forces, committees, units, centers, departments, colleges, and university divisions are not authorized to issue institutional statements on behalf of Ball State University or any constituent component of Ball State University. To avoid any potential confusion, individuals expressing personal opinions are not permitted to use Ball State logos or other identifying marks in a way that could mistakenly imply their personal statements, including communications via social media, are endorsed by the University.

1.7 While Ball State is committed to each individual's right to speak, the University itself does not typically take a public stance on political, moral, or ideological issues. Our University takes positions on such issues only when they affect our core mission or our commitment to free inquiry, free expression, and intellectual diversity long serving as the bedrock foundation of higher education and the pursuit of knowledge.

1.8 Ball State's commitment to freedom of expression comports with our commitment to encouraging and rewarding diversity of thought, innovation, and creativity. As members of the Ball State University community, we will provide opportunities for all people to express their opinions. It is our hope that, as we engage in free expression, we will learn to be comfortable in the dissidence that opposing views can often evoke. Freedom of expression is a powerful tool for testing ideas, for learning, and for growth.

1.9 Ball State maintains a **Freedom of Expression webpage** (<https://www.bsu.edu/about/freedom-of-expression>) for those interested in learning more about this topic. Among other information, this webpage contains FAQs and links to the University's expressive activity policies, including the *Non-Commercial Expressive Activity and Assembly on University Property Policy* and the *Commercial Activity on University Property Policy*. It also contains a link to the *Indiana Code 21-39.5-2-4 Complaint Procedure*.

Adapted from the Report from the Committee of Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago, 2014. Approved by the Board of Trustees, January 31, 2020. Updated June 14, 2024. April 17, 2025.

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