

Appendix IV

Free Expression

The university as an institution of higher education benefits from the free exchange of ideas and robust debate on the issues that confront our society. Our right of freedom of speech and expression is a fundamental foundation of our educational mission, and we respect the right of our students to exercise their right of free speech and expression. No right, however, is unlimited, and with the exercise of any right come important responsibilities. We explain below the rights, responsibilities, and limits on the exercise of free speech and expression in our academic environment.

Free Speech Rights

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects the right of free speech from government interference, and California's Leonard Law prohibits the university from making or enforcing a rule that subjects an enrolled student to disciplinary sanctions solely on the basis of speech protected by the First Amendment. The university fully supports the exercise of free speech consistent with the First Amendment and the Leonard Law, including the right to protest and demonstrate. The university's position is set forth in the following statement on Student Rights and Responsibilities:

Students and student organizations shall be free to examine and discuss all questions of interest to them and to express opinion publicly and privately. They shall be free to support causes by all orderly means, which do not disrupt or substantially interfere with the regular and essential operations and activities of the university,

since such disruption or substantial interference violates the responsible exercise of free inquiry and expression. Students and organizations shall make it clear to the academic and larger communities that in their public expression they speak only for themselves.

The First Amendment protects the exercise of free speech in ways that sometimes makes us uncomfortable, and courts have protected speech that is insulting, outrageous and offensive. The First Amendment protects what is commonly called "hate speech." The university cannot discriminate based on the content of student's speech simply because some other members of the community may find it offensive.

While we hope and encourage USC students to embody the university's *Unifying Values and the Student Commitment*, many statements that may conflict with those cannot serve as grounds for discipline under this Student Handbook. The university in no way condones hate speech and expects that every student will engage in dialogue that is respectful of others. We learn when we listen. The university greatly values civility and respect, and all members of the university community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect. However, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as the sole justification for closing off discussion of ideas, no matter how offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community. The best answer to hate speech is an environment that allows each individual or group to contest the ideas that they oppose and to win over others to their point of view.

If any student is adversely affected by speech that is legally protected, the university has resources available to help. The