



104 Institutional Neutrality

Approved by President

Sidney A. McPhee, President

Effective Date: March 26, 2026

Responsible Division: President

Responsible Office: Office of the University Counsel

Responsible Officer: University Counsel

I. Purpose

This Policy on Institutional Neutrality (Policy) establishes a position of institutional neutrality on disputed political, religious, and ideological matters. As a public institution of higher education and state agency, Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU or University) applies a policy of viewpoint neutrality for institutional statements issued publicly on behalf of the university and its units. This Policy is consistent with its commitment to free and open inquiry in all matters.

II. Scope

This Policy applies to all University employees who issue official University communications and/or public statements in the name of and on behalf of the University or a unit in their official capacity as an employee, or who could be reasonably perceived as issuing a public statement in the name of and on behalf of the University or a unit under their purview.

III. Definitions

- A. Institutional statement. A public statement that is intended to be or could be perceived as representative of the entire University or an entire unit.
- B. Unit. A school, college, department, division, center, institute, or institutional office.

IV. Policy

The mission of Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU or University) is to provide exceptional undergraduate and graduate academic, prepare students to thrive in their chosen profession, and prioritize student success. The University also values outstanding teaching, research,

creative activity, and public service. In furtherance of the University's mission, when speaking in the name of or on behalf of the University or any University unit, University employees shall refrain from taking an official institutional position that includes expressing opinions on disputed political, religious, or ideological issues. Public statements in the name of the University should be avoided, except where determined by the President to be appropriate to address an issue that bears materially and directly on the University's core mission.

The University intentionally embraces institutional neutrality while leaving space for the free exchange of opinions on campus without imposing its own. The position of institutional neutrality will not limit the speech of the University's community acting or speaking as individuals in their own names and not in the name of the University. Rather, institutional neutrality allows the University to be a true marketplace of ideas for all community members. This also creates an inclusive academic environment where freedom of expression, academic inquiry, and the open exchange of diverse viewpoints are upheld in keeping with our nation's long-standing First Amendment principles. As such, a position of institutional neutrality is not intended to limit faculty members' academic freedom, as recognized by MTSU Policy 201, Academic Freedom and Responsibility. Likewise, this Policy is compatible with the University's current policy on free speech and expressive activity, MTSU Policy 103, Free Speech on Campus. Moreover, nothing in this Policy may be construed to limit the free speech of any individual beyond any employment requirements regulated by the University, or the University's ability to advocate for state funding or educational policies to the state or federal government.

Institutional neutrality involves University officials purposefully abstaining from engaging in matters tangential to its core purpose. In line with the Chicago Principles and the 1967 University of Chicago Kalven Report, MTSU practices institutional neutrality to remain true to the fundamental higher education mission of "the discovery, improvement, and dissemination of knowledge."

Forms: none.

Revisions: none.

Last Reviewed: none.

References: MTSU Policies 103 Free Speech on Campus; 201 Academic Freedom and Responsibility; First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution; Article I, Section 19 of the Tennessee Constitution.