



Southern Methodist University

UNIVERSITY POLICY MANUAL

Institutional Neutrality

Policy number: 1.26

Policy section: Institutional Affairs

1. Definitions

Definitions of capitalized terms are set forth in Appendix A.

2. Policy Statement

The University is committed to fostering a robust intellectual environment where a multiplicity of ideas and viewpoints can be freely discussed and debated by all members of the University community. To protect and encourage pluralism of viewpoint among its faculty, students, and staff, no Official Statement attributable to the University as an institution shall be made about any matters that do not bear directly upon the University's core teaching, research, and service mission; essential operations; or its corporate responsibilities.

3. Purpose

At SMU, open dialogue and free speech are central to our mission and core values. As a university, SMU exercises restraint in issuing institutional statements. This approach protects the broadest space for inquiry and dialogue—so that every member of our community can explore, question, and be heard without the weight of an institutional stance shaping the conversation. Public positions on external events can unintentionally limit inclusivity and consistency, while maintaining neutrality preserves room for varied perspectives to be shared, debated, and respected.

This policy of Institutional Neutrality is grounded in the well-recognized and long-standing University of Chicago Kalven Report from 1967, which emphasized: "The instrument of dissent and criticism is the individual faculty member or the individual student. The university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic."

This practice of Institutional Neutrality continues the University's long-standing commitment to free speech, open inquiry, and academic freedom. It ensures that the University remains a forum for its community members to engage in debate, speak in their own voices, and form their own conclusions without the influence of an institutional stance.

This policy is not intended to discourage individual members of the University community from expressing their own views, but to distinguish personal expression from the official voice of the University.

4. Applicability

This policy applies to all Official Statements made on behalf of the University or any of its academic or administrative departments or Units to the public concerning political, social, or cultural matters. It applies to all University Leaders when they are communicating in their official capacity. It also applies to any person issuing public statements in the name of or on behalf of the University or any of its Units, or any person who could be reasonably perceived as doing so.

This policy does not apply to the speech of individual faculty, staff, students or student organizations when they make it clear they are not purporting to speak in the name of or on behalf of the University or any of its Units.

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

“**Institutional Neutrality**” refers to the principle that the University, as an entity, refrains from taking official positions on political, social, or cultural matters or any other matters that are not directly related to its core teaching, research, and service mission; essential operations; or its corporate responsibilities.

“**Official Statement**” refers to a formal written or oral public declaration issued over a university-owned channel that is intended to represent the official position of the University or its Units. This includes, but is not limited to, formal public statements released to the media, students, faculty, staff, alumni, the public, or other institutional stakeholders, published on University websites or official social media channels, or communicated to the entire University community.

“**Unit**” refers to a school, college, department, division, center, institute, program, or other institutional entity of the University.

“**University Leader**” is any individual with the authority to speak on behalf of the University or one of its Units in an official capacity. This includes the Board of Trustees, member of a committee of the Board of Trustees, Executive Officers, the President, Provost, Vice Presidents, Deans, Directors, Department Chairs, and all other designated spokespersons.

APPENDIX B: RELATED RESOURCES

- [SMU Policy 1.5 Use of University Name](#)
- [SMU Policy 6.4 Use of University Facilities by University and Non-University Individuals and Organizations](#)
- [SMU Policy 9.4 Freedom of Speech, Protests and Political Activity](#)

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The official University Policy Manual is housed in the Office of the University Secretary. The University Secretary is responsible for maintaining new and updated policies and for maintaining this website. Should the official University Policy Manual conflict with any internal policies, procedures, departmental administrative rules, or guidelines, that may be contained in manuals provided by schools, departments, or divisions within the University, the official University Policy Manual controls.