

Institutional Neutrality

Maintaining the Marketplace of Ideas

Universities play a unique role in the discovery, expansion, and dissemination of knowledge by fostering scientific exploration, free inquiry, and a robust exchange of ideas. Free speech is the cornerstone of this pursuit of knowledge and safeguarding an open environment for free expression is paramount to Utah State University fulfilling its [mission](#) and [principles of community](#).

Institutional Neutrality

As a modern land-grant university, USU's role is to serve as a catalyst for discourse and engagement that enhances our communities. This is best achieved when the institution maintains a position of neutrality, where faculty and students are empowered to explore their own beliefs, opinions, and personal values and are encouraged to engage in conversations that transcend differences.

Under [HB 261 \(Equal Opportunity Initiatives\)](#) and [USU Policy 2105: Free Expression and Assembly](#), the university maintains institutional neutrality and does not take official positions on topics unrelated to its core mission, responsibilities, or legal obligations.

In compliance with HB 261, USU also does not take institutional positions on the following subjects: anti-racism, bias, critical race theory, implicit bias, intersectionality, prohibited discriminatory practices, or racial privilege.

Institution Statements on Social and Political Issues

Only the president and designated university leaders may speak on behalf of the institution.

USU may publicly express its views on issues that directly, significantly, or specifically impact its mission, role, or pedagogical objectives, such as education, research, service, or academic freedom. This includes matters related to:

Important to Note

Separation of Personal and Institutional Speech

Employees are free to express personal views in private spaces and through personal communication channels. However, they should not use official university resources (email, social media, etc.) to share personal opinions or endorse political or social movements.

Institutional vs. Private Spaces

Signs banners and posters can only be posted in designated spaces on campus (such as kiosks and community bulletin boards). Posting materials on building exteriors, windows, and externally facing doors is not permitted (with the exception for posting office hours and other strictly operational information). Individuals can express personal views in private spaces, for example faculty offices or dorm rooms.

Academic Freedom

Academic freedom allows faculty and students to explore and engage with a wide range of ideas, including sensitive or controversial topics, in their teaching, research, and discussions. Institutional neutrality does not limit faculty or students in their academic work.

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- **Campus safety:** The security and well-being of the campus community.
- **State holidays:** Recognition of state holidays as prescribed by Utah law. For non-state holidays, the institution may repost communications from the Governor's Office or the Utah Board of Higher Education.
- **Rule of law:** Commitment to the rule of law, including freedom of expression.
- **Policy and legislation:** Policies or legislation that affect one of the institution's core missions.
- **Community expression:** Addressing instances of community members' protected expression that may create a hostile environment based on race, color, or national origin.

When events arise that do not directly, significantly, or specifically affect the institution's mission, role, or pedagogical objectives, the institution may choose to comment to reaffirm its commitment to civility, nondiscrimination, and diversity of viewpoints. This may include:

- **Safety concerns:** Addressing events or activities that make members of the institution's community feel unsafe.
- **Significant impact:** Responding to events or activities that have a substantial impact on the institution's community.
- **Personal tragedies:** Offering condolences or support in response to the death of a current or former student, faculty member, or staff member.

When determining whether the university should take an official position or issue a statement regarding current events, USU relies on our mission and principles of community as a guide and reserves the institutional voice for matters that directly impact its ability to fulfill its land-grant mission. On all other matters, the university remains neutral.

University's Role During Social and Political Events

While maintaining institutional neutrality, USU remains committed to training the next generation of ethical leaders, nurturing intellectual growth and the expansion of knowledge, respecting the fundamental value of [freedom of speech](#), and encouraging a diversity of perspectives.

When students or employees are directly affected by social and political events, university leaders will identify ways to offer individualized support to affected individuals and communities and encourage all members of our community to do the same.

What Institutional Neutrality Means for Employees

As a member of the university, you may express personal viewpoints, but the university as an institution must remain neutral. This neutrality applies to all employees in their role representing the university, colleges, divisions, departments, programs, committees or other sub-units and extends to the university's public communications, events, and visual displays.

Communications and Public Statements

When speaking in any public or professional capacity, university employees must separate their personal views from institutional speech. If expressing personal opinions in public forums, employees should clarify that their statements are not on behalf of the university.

- *Example:* If a staff member attends a public forum and shares a political opinion, they might add: "These views are my own and do not represent my employer's position."

Similarly, all official university communications, including emails, social media, and publications, should be neutral and free of political or social endorsements. Personal opinions should not be expressed using university resources or platforms.

- *Example:* A professor should avoid using their university email to share personal political opinions with a broader audience.

Visual and Symbolic Expression

Signs, notices, posters, or banners may only be posted on university spaces specifically designated for public postings. Postings in or adjacent to student housing must comply with USU's Student Housing regulations. No sign, poster, paint, stickers or other written messages may be placed, affixed, or applied to any university surface (except for those designated for public posting), including, but not limited to, walls, windows, floors, doors, light posts, or any other surface. This restriction is subject to a narrow exception that permits the posting of signage conveying strictly operational information, such as offices hours, on office windows and doors.

This policy maintains aesthetic standards on campus and upholds USU's commitment to institutional neutrality.

- *Example:* A university office should not display a political candidate's campaign sign in the hallway or on exterior-facing windows.

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