

# Statement on Freedom of Expression at the University of Alberta

*Approved by the Board of Governors of the University of Alberta on December 13, 2019*

The mission and mandate of the University of Alberta is to discover, disseminate, and apply knowledge for the benefit of society through teaching and learning, research, innovation and creative activity, community involvement, and partnerships. To achieve our mission and mandate, we must cultivate an equitable and inclusive environment that fosters respect for human dignity and supports the ability and skills of all members of our diverse community to learn and to discover.

Freedom of expression is one of the key elements of such an environment and has been central to the university since its founding. Learning requires exposure to a variety of views, including those with which one disagrees, and the ability to participate in intellectual debate – including having one’s own views challenged. Research and discovery require the ability to challenge the conventional, to communicate findings and their implications, and to provide informed commentary in the public sphere. Across all areas of its mandate, the university is committed to intellectual integrity, rigorous inquiry, and the robust expression and discussion of ideas. Fostering the ability of members of the university community to engage in debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the university’s educational mission. Recognizing that free expression can thrive only where all members of the university

community have the ability to participate fully, we strive to foster an inclusive and respectful institutional culture that is free of discrimination and harassment.

The University of Alberta remains committed to free expression in all forms of communication, including non-violent protest and dissent. The university is a place of free and open inquiry in all matters, and all members of the university community have the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, view, challenge, profess, and learn. Members of the university community have the right to criticize and question other views expressed on our campuses, but may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with others' freedom of expression. Debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forward are thought by some, or even most, to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or misguided. It is for individuals, not the institution, to make those judgments for themselves and to act not by seeking to suppress expression, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas they oppose. The university does not attempt to shield members of the university community from ideas or opinions they disagree with or find offensive. Mutual respect and civility are valued, but their absence does not constitute sufficient justification to limit free expression.

Freedom of expression at the university does not mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. Free expression is subject to the limitations imposed by Canadian or Alberta law. The university has the authority to restrict expression that violates law, causes the university to violate law, violates applicable university policies, procedures or collective agreements, falsely defames, constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, or unjustifiably violates privacy or confidentiality interests. The university may also regulate the time, place and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the university. However, this administrative

discretion should not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with the University of Alberta's overarching commitment to free expression. Ideas and opinions presented on our campuses are neither a reflection of, nor an endorsement from, the university, unless otherwise stated.

In a diverse and inclusive university environment characterized by lively debate, people can expect, from time to time, to be confronted by concepts or images that they find offensive or disturbing, and to have their ideas questioned or challenged. The university remains committed to providing support services to those who need them.

The right to academic freedom is addressed separately in the context of the collective agreement with the Association of Academic Staff of the University of Alberta.

Complaint processes are available through existing policies, procedures, and collective agreements.