

Stetson University

Statement of Principles of Free Expression

Preamble

At Stetson University, we teach, learn, and conduct research together in the classroom and in the many spaces, physical and virtual, that we share. The University's mission is "to provide an excellent education in a creative community where learning and values meet, and to foster in students the qualities of mind and heart that will prepare them to reach their full potential as informed citizens of local communities and the world." To achieve this mission, our University protects and supports free expression, including the freedom of inquiry and speech, academic freedom, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom to publish. This statement serves to explicate, undergird, and model Stetson's devotion to free and open communication between and among all its stakeholders, in DeLand, Gulfport, and beyond. These principles will also guide the University as it moves forward in formulating policy regarding free expression.

Statement

The ability to engage in open inquiry, scientific investigation, and critical discourse is central to the mission of academia. Academic institutions are positioned to create new knowledge as well as to challenge previously held beliefs about science, history, culture, and politics. The ability to teach, to question, and to produce data shielded from political, social, and cultural pressures depends on a strong commitment to freedom of expression. As such, we proclaim our commitment to free expression and to open inquiry as a fundamental value of our institution.

We define speech broadly, to include all forms of expression. These forms of expression include political speech, organized and casual; artistic expressions, including electronic media; discussions of social views, including those related to gender, class, race, religion, and other demographics; religious expression; scientific inquiry; historical analyses; critiques of government; scientific studies; art; scholarship; and criticisms of the university itself. These protections are extended to our community members both on and off campus. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but it is meant to give a sense of the diversity of ways and contexts in which the members of the University community express themselves.

We provide members of our community, including students, faculty, staff, and alumni, the broadest possible latitude to teach, learn, conduct research, read, listen, and dialogue without interference. Aside from a range of circumstances articulated in published University policies and necessary for the conduct of the University's business, our University respects community members' efforts to investigate, debate, and dialogue on matters of interest, including those matters that might be considered controversial.

We understand that this commitment to free expression necessarily opens our community to discomfort and argumentation. However, we believe that exposure to challenging views, even those viewed by some as offensive, is an important part of personal growth and education. The best insights are achieved through dialogue which is civil, intellectual, and respectful of differing

views. Nevertheless, without protection for expression that might be deemed objectionable, offensive, or challenging, free expression as a value has little meaning. Therefore, perceptions of incivility should not be used as justification to impinge upon the rights of free expression of our community.

Our commitment does not include expression that violates the law or otherwise violates University policy, including violence and threats of violence, unlawful harassment, defamation, invasions of privacy, violations of confidentiality agreements, or expression that otherwise interferes with the functioning of the University, including expression that prevents others from accessing learning opportunities. The University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression so the operations of the University are not impacted. The University may require anyone who visits our campus to abide by the policies, rules, and regulations of the University.

We adhere to the principle that debate and dialogue should not be suppressed because some members of our University community or individuals outside the University consider such views to be politically harmful, offensive, politically incorrect, or pernicious. Expressed views are open to criticism, debate, and condemnation. Open debate and dialogue is a natural part of the marketplace of ideas. Hence, attempts to suppress or punish protected expression or speakers are anathema to the free expression necessary for intellectual and cultural growth. Teaching our members how to strategically, intellectually, and collegially debate challenging ideas is part of the mission of our University.

Empowering faculty, staff, students, and alumni to express themselves freely also means ensuring that existing structures and policies as well as any future structures and policies impacting speech provide all stakeholders a process and platform to express themselves. Stetson University supports in particular the rights of individuals, especially those of marginalized groups, to express views that may not comport with the status quo. We believe that an atmosphere of free expression provides an environment in which individuality may be expressed and different approaches to life expressed and shared in an atmosphere of mutual learning and respect.

Finally, we call on the members of our University community to engage responsibly in expression in a manner that does not impede the ability of individuals to express themselves or to listen to the expressions of others. We also call on our community members to listen actively, to evaluate, and to understand ideas of others in a manner that upholds our commitment to fostering qualities of the mind and heart in an informed citizenry. Our community members should not engage in behaviors that inhibit, chill, drown out, or silence the expressions of others, nor impede the ability to listen to the expressions of others.