

Motion 102-2024

Statement of Principles, Emory College of Arts and Sciences (ECAS) Freedom of Expression*

Because the Emory College of Arts and Sciences is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, the faculty believe that all members of its community should have the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. We believe these freedoms are limited only to the extent that they do not impinge on teaching and research and are in accord with all applicable university policies.

Members of the College community will often disagree—sometimes vehemently—with ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or offensive. We greatly value civility and respect, though there may be disagreement about their definition. However, concerns about civility and respect can never be used as a justification for ending discussion of ideas, however disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

The freedom to debate comes with responsibilities. These responsibilities are set out in various university policies. The College believes that the freedom of debate may be restricted when expression violates the law, falsely defames an individual, constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or directly impedes teaching and research. These are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression. It is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with our commitment to the free and open discussion of ideas.

Responsible debate and deliberation are essential parts of the College's educational mission. We are a community at the center of which is discovery and the dissemination of knowledge. These are our sacred values and commitments. Freedom of expression is important precisely because it establishes the environment for the creation of ideas that may be provocative, new, unorthodox, even disturbing. This includes debate and deliberation of ideas that some members of the community may find offensive, unwise, or wrong-headed. Criticism, including protest, is vitally important, as long as it does not obstruct or interfere with the freedom of others to express their views, including teaching and research. The College has a solemn responsibility not only to promote the lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.

*This statement uses language from Princeton University's "Commitment to Freedom of Expression," adopted by the university faculty on 6 April 2015, and originally based on the 2015 University of Chicago "Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression," and Yale University's 1975 Free Expression policy.