

# 1.A Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression

The University of Michigan recognizes the free expression of ideas as fundamental to its mission of education and research. This commitment is outlined in the University's [Standard Practice Guide 601.01](#). The statement was adopted by the Board of Regents in 1988 and revised in 1993.

Recent events at the University of Michigan and elsewhere emphasize the pressing need for members of the University community— including administrators, faculty, staff, and students—to reaffirm formally their deep commitment to freedom of speech and artistic expression and to clarify the implications of that commitment. Freedom of speech in this context will be taken to encompass all forms of communication and artistic expression as well as the freedom to listen, watch, protest, or otherwise participate in such communication. It is hoped that this reaffirmation will win the support, in spirit and in letter, of people representing the entire spectrum of opinion of the University community in order to create a truly open forum, one in which diverse opinions can be expressed and heard.

Expression of diverse points of view is of the highest importance, not only for those who espouse a cause or position and then defend it, but also for those who hear and pass judgment on that defense. The belief that an opinion is pernicious, false, or in any other way detestable cannot be grounds for its suppression.

When a speech or some form of artistic expression such as a play or concert is prevented by disruptive protest from taking place or concluding, the effect is just as surely an attack on freedom of speech or artistic expression as the deliberate suppression or prohibition of a speaker or artist by authorities. At the same time, however, the rights of free expression enjoyed by speakers or performers do not negate the rights of free expression of those who would protest the speech or performance.

The guidelines that follow concern how most fully to protect rights of free expression for speakers, performers, and protesters alike. They apply to settings in which an audience has been assembled for a talk or performance, or in which a talk or performance takes place in a public setting at the University, but do not apply to the classroom.

They are not general guidelines concerning freedom of expression among individuals or in other University settings where protest might occur. Moreover, they do not cover acts of physical violence, or verbal harassment or threats directed at individuals in which there is no intent to communicate publicly or with a wider audience. Nor do these guidelines in any way restrict the application of civil or criminal law. Finally, these are not guidelines concerning appropriate or civil conduct at speeches or artistic performances. Rude or offensive behavior, though inconsistent with the standards of civility that we hope would prevail on a university campus, sometimes falls within the legitimate exercise of freedom of speech and, when it does, may not be suppressed.

These guidelines apply to members of the University community (students, faculty, staff, and administrators) and to their invited guests. By following these guidelines, we seek to maintain at the University an environment in which the free exchange of opinions can flourish, where the learning that such exchange makes possible can occur. We welcome members of the broader public to participate in this free exchange, and we expect those who do to observe the limits of mutual tolerance embodied in these guidelines.

With these qualifications in mind, the Committee on Civil Liberties and Civil Rights of the Senate Assembly recommends to the University community endorsement and adoption of the following

guidelines pertaining to freedom of speech and artistic expression as published in [SPG 601.01](#).

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