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UNIVERSITY STATEMENT ON FREE SPEECH AND EXPRESSION

Christopher Newport University educates students to be responsible citizens living lives of significance. An essential element of this education is the development of independent judgment. The acquisition of independent judgment requires that students be both required – and encouraged – to inquire deeply into old and new ideas alike. Students must learn how to subject ideas to the crucible of rigorous discussion and debate, and have their own ideas confronted with the same rigorous examination.

Free inquiry is at the core of liberal learning. It can only flourish where the freedom of expression is not only respected, but valued. As has been observed by others, “without a vibrant commitment to free and open inquiry, a university ceases to be a university.”

Consequently, Christopher Newport University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, and offers to its students, faculty and staff the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn. Of course, the ideas of different members of the University community will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable or even deeply offensive.

Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

Christopher Newport will not limit speech or discussion because the ideas put forth are thought by some – or even all – members of the community to be offensive, upsetting, unwise, immoral or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose.

No freedom is absolute and every freedom carries with it personal responsibility. Therefore, as a corollary to the University’s commitment to protect and promote free

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expression, members of the University community must also act in conformity with these principles. The University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.

Although faculty, students and staff are free to criticize, challenge, and condemn views expressed on campus by exercising their own right to speak, they may not obstruct, disrupt or otherwise interfere with the expression of the views of others, though they may reject or even loathe them.

Equally important, members of the CNU community shall always exercise their freedom of expression in a manner that does not interfere with or disrupt the operation of the University or the activities of other members of the community. To ensure this, the University will reasonably regulate the time, place and manner of expression. But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University's commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas. Speech which violates the law – including speech or conduct intended to threaten, harass or intimidate – will not be tolerated.

History teaches that life as a responsible citizen, in a free representative republic, is likely to require contesting offensive, unwarranted or dangerous ideas. However, obstruction or suppression of such ideas is neither appropriate nor, in the long run, effective. Instead, one must be prepared to engage in robust counter-speech that challenges the merits of ideas we disagree with, exposes them for what they are, dismantles specious arguments, and identifies fear mongering and fallacy.

It is the responsibility and commitment of Christopher Newport University to educate our students in a culture that embraces individual freedom and the personal responsibility that comes with it.

More information about freedom of speech at Christopher Newport can be found [here](#).

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