

UW Policies

Interim

UW System Administrative Policy 100-Interim 10

Interim: Institutional Statements

Original Issuance Date: September 12, 2024**Expiration Date:** This interim policy action will expire on October 1, 2025 or upon approval of the new System Administrative Policy on Institutional Statements, whichever is sooner.

1. Interim Policy Purpose

Regent Policy Document (RPD) 4-21, *Commitment to Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression* (<https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/commitment-to-academic-freedom-and-freedom-of-expression/>), affirms the Board of Regents' commitment to those principles. The Board acknowledges that "different ideas in the university community will often and quite naturally conflict," and stipulates that, in instances of such conflict, "[i]t is for the members of the university community, not for the institution itself, to make those judgments for themselves."

In accordance with RPD 4-21 (<https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/commitment-to-academic-freedom-and-freedom-of-expression/>), and in order to uphold and protect academic freedom, freedom of expression, and an environment in which competing ideas can be freely discussed and debated by all members of the university community, it is necessary that all official statements issued in the name of and on behalf of the institution are limited to matters that directly affect the operations and mission of the university, and that maintain viewpoint neutrality in any reference to a matter of political or social controversy.

2. Related Policies

This is a new interim administrative policy. It is designed to provide further clarification and guidance on the principles affirmed in RPD 4-21, *Commitment to Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression* (<https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/commitment-to-academic-freedom-and-freedom-of-expression/>).

3. Scope

This policy applies to UW System Administration and all UW universities, including all units. It also applies to any person seeking to issue public statements in the name of and on behalf of any university or unit in their official capacity as an employee, or who could be reasonably perceived as issuing a public statement in the name of and on behalf of any university or unit under their purview.

This policy does not apply to statements made by faculty or staff in exercising academic freedom with respect to scholarship, teaching, and intellectual debate, nor to faculty or staff acting on their own behalf in their capacity as individuals and not purporting to speak in the name of and on behalf of any university or unit.

4. Definitions

Public statement: A written public declaration by a university leader to students, faculty, staff, alumni, the press, the public, or other institutional stakeholders issued over a university-owned channel. This policy specifically concerns public statements that address matters of political or social controversy.

University Leader: The UW System president and vice presidents, the university chancellors, provosts, vice chancellors, deans, directors, department chairs and others who, when communicating in their official capacity, are likely to be perceived as speaking in the name of and on behalf of the institution or one of its units.

Unit: A school, college, department, division, center, institute, program or other institutional entity.

Institutional statement: A public statement that is intended to be or could be perceived as representative of the entire institution or an entire unit.

5. Interim Policy Statement

Institutional statements issued by university leaders should be limited to matters that directly affect the operations and core mission of the university, and should maintain viewpoint neutrality in any reference to any matter of political or social controversy.

Institutional statements may include communications on the impact of proposed or enacted regulations, legislation, or court decisions that materially affect the operations and core mission of the university. Such institutional statements may also express a position of support or opposition only when authorized by the president or chancellor.

Institutional statements may include communications that address an event or issue specific to the university, whether on- or off-campus. Institutional statements may include communications that address an event or issue external to the university that may be reasonably determined to affect students or employees for the purpose of providing information on university support services. In all instances, such institutional statements may affirm the university's mission and the values of mutual respect and belonging, but should maintain viewpoint neutrality on any aspect of the precipitating event or issue that does not constitute a direct, university-specific violation of those principles.

Institutional statements expressing solidarity or empathy should be avoided when their selective issuance implies preference for the viewpoint of one group over another.

Where there is reasonable disagreement about whether an event or issue directly affects the operations or core mission of the university, university leaders are encouraged to forgo an institutional statement.

This policy does not apply to faculty and staff within a unit who may choose to express their expertise or judgment of a situation as it relates to their academic disciplines or research expertise, including analysis or commentary on an issue. Care should be exercised to ensure that such statements, particularly when posted on university-owned channels, are not reasonably likely to be misconstrued to represent the university or unit. Chancellors are authorized to adopt procedures requiring that such statements include a clear indication that the statement does not represent the institution or unit. Additionally, the policy is not intended to apply to faculty and staff expressing personal statements on non-university-owned channels.

The president and chancellors may adopt additional institution-specific guidance and procedures that are consistent with this policy. These may include, but are not limited to:

- limitations on personnel authorized to issue an institutional statement
- procedures for internal approval of the issuance of an institutional or unit-specific statement
- guidance in discerning whether an issue is directly related to the operations or core mission of the university
- disclaimer requirements for faculty or staff not speaking on behalf of the institution, and
- procedures by which institutional statements may be produced, reviewed and issued.

The president and chancellors may not expand the scope of this policy to restrict the free expression rights of individuals or groups of individuals who do not present themselves as speaking in the name of and on behalf of the university or a unit.

6. Supplemental Documents

None listed.

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