

# Free Speech

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Western Kentucky University is dedicated to upholding freedom of expression as a cornerstone of its academic mission. The university defends the ideals of free speech, academic freedom and inquiry and believes that the open exchange of ideas, even those that are controversial or unpopular, is essential to the pursuit of knowledge and the growth of a dynamic educational environment.

WKU encourages open dialogue among students, faculty, staff and visitors but emphasizes the importance of maintaining a safe and respectful atmosphere free of activities meant to incite or disrupt routine operations. Civil discourse is that which upholds the rights and dignity of others and is free from the threat of retribution.

All expressions and demonstrations on campus must adhere to university policies, which are designed to ensure the safety and well-being of our community. Failure to comply with those policies will result in negative consequences.

Guidelines for Freedom of Expression at WKU

Expressive Activity Notification Form

## **The Campus Free Speech Protection Act**

As a guardian of free speech, WKU has an obligation to establish an environment where a wide range of perspectives are exchanged, even if the ideas presented are different from our own, offensive or even contemptable. Furthermore, as a *public* university WKU is compelled by law to do so. The [Campus Free Speech Protection Act](#), passed by the Kentucky Legislature and signed into law by the Governor in 2019, prohibits WKU from disinviting speakers who have been invited by students, faculty or staff and obligates the university to ensure that invited speakers are not disrupted or restricted. We cannot tolerate a “heckler’s veto” intended to disrupt or cancel an event and, in turn, suppress the speech of the speaker.

## **Institutional Neutrality**

WKU intentionally refrains from engaging in matters tangential to our core mission of educating students, knowledge creation and dissemination. Outlined in the Chicago Principles and the 1967 University of Chicago Kalven Report, institutional neutrality allows universities to create an environment where the free exchange of ideas is not stifled by official institutional statements or comments from leadership.

Guided by the concept of institutional neutrality, WKU does not take positions on local, national or international issues unrelated to higher education or the university directly - clarifying that students and faculty are the instruments of dissent and critique. The university creates the space for the critics to operate but is not the critic itself. If WKU were to compromise our institutional neutrality in response to donors, alumni, politicians, activists and others, we would jeopardize our faculty and students' ability to challenge controversial and uncomfortable ideas.