

The Florida College System Council of Presidents Statement on Free Expression

Institutions comprising the Florida College System support this Statement on Free Expression to support and encourage full and open discourse and the robust exchange of ideas and perspectives on our respective campuses. The principles of freedom of speech and freedom of expression in the United States and Florida Constitutions, in addition to being legal rights, are an integral part of our mission to deliver a high quality academic experience for our students and prepare all students for full participation in society. The purpose of this Statement is to document our dedication to these principles and to affirm our campus communities' commitment to maintaining our campuses as places where the open exchange of knowledge and ideas furthers our mission.

Because our institutions are committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, all members of our communities are provided the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of our institutions, we fully respect and support the freedom of all members of our communities to discuss any problem that presents itself.

Of course, the ideas of different members of our communities will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of our institutions to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, our communities 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 communities.

Each institution has the responsibility to create a safe environment where all forms of expression can be proffered. However, we must also protect against any expression that violates the law or the Constitution. In addition, we may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of our institutions. 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 our commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.

Our fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of our communities to be offensive, unwise, or immoral. It is for the individual members of our communities, not for the institutions, to make those judgments for themselves, and

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. Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the college community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of our educational mission.

As a corollary to our commitment to protect and promote free expression, members of our communities must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression. Although members of our communities are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campuses, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campuses, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe. To this end, we have 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.

The Florida College System Council of Presidents hereby commits to have this Statement on Free Expression, as a reflection of our respective existing policies, presented for formal adoption through our established college governance processes:

By:  _____

Date: 4-12-19

Ava L. Parker, J.D., Chair
Florida College System Council of Presidents