



APLU Statement on Public Universities' Commitment to Free Speech

Free speech is the lifeblood of our democracy. It is the foundation of academic inquiry. And it is essential for providing a robust learning environment for an increasingly diverse student body. As public institutions, public universities are rightly held to constitutional standards for protecting speech.

Public universities are firmly committed to ensuring their students are exposed to an array of ideas and opinions – those with which they agree and, importantly, those that challenge their perspectives and worldview. Any attempt to limit the free exchange of ideas is an affront to our shared values as Americans.

The vital importance of these civil liberties makes them no easier to safeguard. While sometimes challenging, public universities must protect constitutional speech even if it is odious and hateful. Public universities and their leaders seek to continuously learn from their experiences as they facilitate the expression of clashing opinions and foster a productive learning environment.

It is precisely because of this unwavering commitment to free speech that provocative individuals target public university campuses to deliver speeches. While even the most inflammatory individuals have a constitutional right to speak, there is a stark difference between those seeking to advance a public dialogue and those who aim to deliberately sow discord, denigrate others, and foment violence.

Despite those efforts, public universities are redoubling their work to educate the next generation on the constitutional right to free speech and the importance of protecting it. Such environments allow students and guest speakers of all conceivable viewpoints to engage in countless acts of free speech each day on public university campuses.

Just as communities across the country struggle to facilitate free and civil debate at a time when polarization has reached new heights, public universities must strive to safeguard those civil liberties on their campuses. With a mission to advance the public interest, public universities have a responsibility to not just to be outspoken advocates for free speech, but leaders in providing a forum for civil discourse and disagreement.

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