

Spring 2017

Kenyon College Faculty Resolution on Freedom of Expression for Faculty and Students

We, the Kenyon faculty, strongly support the free expression and exchange of ideas. Because the central mission of the College, liberal education, requires free and open inquiry in all matters, students and faculty should have the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. One aim of liberal education is to encourage critical and creative thinking. The College achieves this, in part, by providing the conditions within which strong disagreement, independent judgment, and the questioning of all assumptions, can flourish. Everyone is susceptible to error. By listening to and challenging those with whom we disagree, we open ourselves to the possibility of learning. And even when debates and arguments don't change our opinions, they may help us understand their grounds more fully and improve our ability to defend them rationally and persuasively.

Freedom of expression applies to opinions and inquiry regarding political, cultural, religious, scientific, and social matters, as well as to those regarding the College itself and its policies. It is especially critical in the classroom, in research and publication, and in all educational activities, narrowly understood. But more broadly, we regard the whole Kenyon experience as a contribution to the liberal education of both faculty and students. We therefore support the broadest possible freedom of expression for faculty and students throughout the College. Freedom of expression applies to views and ideas that most members of the College may consider mistaken, dangerous, or even despicable. The ideas of different members of the College community will quite naturally often conflict, but it is not the proper role of the College to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or offensive. Although the College values civility and encourages all members of the community to maintain a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect should never be used as a justification for limiting discussion of ideas. Freedom of expression does not, of course, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, whenever they wish. The College may prohibit expression that violates the law, defames specific individuals, unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or constitutes a genuine threat or harassment. (For a detailed discussion of the distinction between free expression and threat or harassment, see Kenyon's Discriminatory Harassment Policy and Procedures.[1]) In addition, the College may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the College. These limitations, however, are narrow exceptions; it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the College's commitment to a free expression of ideas.

Portions of this statement are adapted from the Statement on Academic Freedom adopted in April 2016 by the Faculty of Denison University and from University of Chicago Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression released in January 2015.

Discussion and dissemination of the statement. The statement developed by the committee shall be referred to the standing committees CPC, CAS and Senate to discuss and consider its implications for the classroom and the academic life of our community. In addition, we encourage the Staff Council to discuss and develop a statement on freedom of expression appropriate to other Kenyon employees.

[1] <http://www.kenyon.edu/directories/offices-services/office-of-student-rights-and-responsibilities/policies-regulations/discriminatory-harassment-policy-and-procedures/>