



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Statement on Principles of Free Expression

July 2012

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The University of Chicago is an institution fully committed to the creation of knowledge across the spectrum of disciplines and professions, firm in its belief that a culture of intense inquiry and informed argument generates lasting ideas, and that the members of its community have a responsibility both to challenge and to listen. Geoffrey R. Stone, Edward H. Levi Distinguished Service Professor of Law and former Provost of the University, captures this ethos in his July 2012 statement of the aspirations of the University of Chicago:

Eighty years ago, a student organization at the University of Chicago invited William Z. Foster, the Communist Party's candidate for President, to lecture on campus. This triggered a storm of protest from critics both on and off campus. To those who condemned the University for allowing the event, University President Robert M. Hutchins responded that "our students . . . should have freedom to discuss any problem that presents itself." He insisted that the "cure" for ideas we oppose "lies through open discussion rather than through inhibition." On a later occasion, Hutchins added that "free inquiry is indispensable to the good life, that universities exist for the sake of such inquiry, [and] that without it they cease to be universities."

This incident captures both the spirit and the promise of the University of Chicago. Because the University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of the University, the University of Chicago fully respects and supports the freedom of all students, faculty and staff "to discuss any problem that presents itself," free of interference.

This is not to say that this freedom is absolute. In narrowly-defined circumstances, the University may properly restrict expression, for example, that violates the law, is threatening, harassing, or defamatory, or invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests. Moreover, the University may reasonably regulate the time, place and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the University.

Fundamentally, however, the University is committed to the principle that it may not restrict debate or deliberation because the ideas put forth are thought to be

offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the members of the University community to make those judgments for themselves.

As a corollary to this commitment, members of the University community must also act in conformity with this principle. Although faculty, students and staff are free to criticize, contest and condemn the views expressed on campus, they may not obstruct, disrupt, or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe.

For members of the University community, as for the University itself, the proper response to ideas they find offensive, unwarranted and dangerous is not interference, obstruction, or suppression. It is, instead, to engage in robust counter-speech that challenges the merits of those ideas and exposes them for what they are. To this end, the University has 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.

As Robert M. Hutchins observed, without a vibrant commitment to free and open inquiry, a university ceases to be a university. The University of Chicago's long-standing commitment to this principle lies at the very core of the University's greatness.

The University of Chicago

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