

Controversial Speakers at OSU -FAQ's

Published 4/30/17

Revised 9/22/17

Next revision 1/15/18

1. This speaker's viewpoints are in conflict with OSU's institutional values. Why would OSU allow a speaker that does not represent its values?

Engaging with viewpoints that are different than our own through difficult, uncomfortable dialogue and critical thinking is an essential part of becoming an engaged community member. To that end, one of the central roles of the university is to protect the right to free expression – a foundational civil right that is guaranteed by the U.S. and Oregon constitutions. The right to counter-speech is also foundational to the protection of free speech. The advancement of free speech and counter-speech are essential parts of the university's commitment to educate students who can grapple with a range of viewpoints, ideas and opinions.

It is not the role of, nor is often within the ability of, the university to shut down ideas, even if they are offensive, controversial, hateful, or at odds with OSU's institutional values because differences and dissenting viewpoints are part of the educational process. When confronted with these viewpoints, the OSU community has an opportunity to use its voice by marshalling evidence, developing counter-arguments and speaking back.

2. What will OSU do to ensure our safety while this speaker is on-campus?

Our foremost duty as an institution is to ensure the safety of our community members. For all speakers who seek access to reserved venues, the venue management reviews the necessary safety and security requirements necessary to support the event. Additional safety measures will be considered and may be utilized based on institutional assessment of the event. The cost of additional safety measures may be included in the sponsoring group's cost of facility use. During an event, OSU will carefully and sensitively monitor and respond to situations to safeguard campus safety. All measures that are taken will be content and viewpoint neutral.

Part of our commitment to the safety of campus will include ongoing assessments of risk and disruption before and during the event in question. This assessment will be conducted by a team of interdisciplinary staff from the Department of Public Safety, Oregon State Police, Student Affairs, Risk Management, Office of Institutional Diversity, and in conjunction with the host of the program. If the risks to the safety of the campus community are deemed significant enough, the university reserves the right to cancel, postpone, or relocate an event to mitigate the identified risks.

3. This speaker is not hosted by a current OSU student, student organization, faculty or staff member – how can the speaker be allowed on-campus?

As a general matter, Oregon State University, as a state entity, is legally required to permit speakers in public areas, regardless of content or viewpoint. OSU has several locations on campus that are considered public venues and can be reserved by non-OSU affiliated individuals and groups.

University grounds are open to the public and the university community for speech activities except any grounds designated for authorized access only. University buildings are open to the public and the university community for speech activities during regular business hours of the particular building, except the following:

- (a) Classroom buildings;
- (b) Research and laboratory facilities and buildings;
- (c) The Valley Library;
- (d) Plageman Hall (Student Health Center);
- (e) Any area or building designated for authorized access only.

Speech activities in residence halls and university-owned dining halls may be regulated by the Executive Director of University Housing and Dining Services in consultation with appropriate student residence associations. Such regulations shall be content neutral.

4. This person promulgates hate speech – why is the university allowing hate speech?

Although members of the OSU community, including administration, may oppose the content of the speaker, freedom of speech generally cannot be denied because an opinion or the language used to express it is viewed as highly offensive. In short, hate speech is generally not illegal. The university may exercise its own right to speak out against speech that runs counter to OSU's commitment to providing inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. Freedom of expression does not extend to specific threats of violence against particular individuals and cannot be exercised in ways that significantly disrupt the operation of the university or the legal rights of others. OSU will carefully and sensitively monitor and respond to situations to safeguard campus safety.

5. Will OSU leadership publicly express disagreement with the content of this speaker's message?

The university may exercise its own right to speak out against speech that runs counter to OSU's commitment to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. As an institution, we reserve the right to speak against messages that are contrary to our educational mission and values, encourage more dialogue, and continue to provide opportunities for learning.

6. Why is OSU allowing this speaker on campus when they have incited protest or even violence on other campuses?

Freedom of expression is a right that may raise strong emotional responses when put into practice. OSU will work with both organizers sponsoring the speaker, and those opposing the speaker, to maintain a safe campus environment while allowing the free expression of ideas and opinions, which can at times include protest and demonstration. Freedom of expression does not extend to specific threats of violence against particular individuals and cannot be exercised in ways that significantly disrupt the operation of the university or the legal rights of others. OSU will carefully and sensitively monitor and respond to situations to safeguard campus safety.

7. Will student sponsors of a speaker who promulgates hate speech be held accountable through the Student Conduct Code?

Speech that promotes specific threats of violence against particular individuals or that significantly disrupts the operation of the university or the legal rights of others may be regulated through the Student Conduct Code. University administrators may work with organizers to help the organizers understand how a speaker's viewpoints may negatively affect certain communities or particular individuals, and assist the organizers in creating opportunities for respectful engagement with a speaker. If a speaker or event affects a substantial university interest, including but not limited to harm or threats of harm to health or safety, behavior that causes significant community disruption, or behavior that is detrimental to the educational mission or interests of the institution, the university may choose to not allow the controversial speaker to utilize campus venues.

8. As an OSU community member, what can I do to express disagreement with the content of this speaker's message?

As a member of the OSU community, you can express your disagreement with a speaker's message through counter-speech that includes:

- Ask OSU, other organizations and student leaders to denounce the speaker, group, or message. While it might not be possible, as a state institution, for OSU to cancel the event, OSU, other organizations and student leaders can denounce messages that are contrary to their values.
- Engage in dialogue with the group hosting the event. It is unlikely that a speaker, group, or message arrived on campus without an invitation. Sometimes, the views of the speaker or group do not correspond to the student group that invited them and resolution may be achieved through open dialogue around intentions.
- Ignore and counter-program the event. Guidance from the Southern Poverty Law Center suggests an effective method of counter-speech is to not draw

attention to speech that you disagree with. If the intention of the group/speaker coming to campus is to enflame emotions or create a spectacle, drawing attention to the speaker may help accomplish their aim. Instead of attending the event, OSU community members may invite a speaker with an opposing message, conduct a teach-in, host a letter-writing campaign, organize a community art project, or any number of activities that do not give attention to the offensive speaker, group or message.

- Assemble to express differing opinions with the speaker, group, or message being shared. Assembly can also take many creative forms other than demonstration.
- Request certain actions from the university or others affiliated with OSU, such as denouncing the speaker, group, or message or providing support and advice on counter-speech activities.

9. If I have additional concerns, who should I contact?

Concerns can be brought to the building manager of the venue hosting the speaker, the sponsoring organization, Department of Public Safety at 541-737-3010, or the Dean of Students Office, at 541-737-8748.