

Oregon State University

Philosophy, Priorities and Principles for Protest and Assembly

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This document is intended to assist Oregon State University (OSU) in supporting and engaging with free speech and expression activities, including activism, protest, and assembly. The intent is to preserve the rights of those participating in the speech and expression activities, as well as the activities that are impacted.

Planning and response to free speech activities is informed by University Standard 04-040 Freedom of Speech and Expression. Specifically,

Section 2.1.

The university seeks to create and maintain an inclusive environment that encourages the free exchange of ideas. Freedom of speech and expression are indispensable to the university's ability to transmit knowledge and fundamental to the University Community's pursuit to discover, explore, interpret, and question knowledge and opinions. Differences and dissenting viewpoints are not only tolerated but welcomed as part of the educational process.

Section 2.2.

Free speech may not be exercised in ways that unreasonably interfere with the university's ability to fulfill its mission; nor may it be exercised in ways that threaten the safety of its property and people or its orderly operation; nor may it infringe upon the rights and interests of others to teach, learn, work, conduct business, use university facilities or pursue their normal activities.

Adhering to these and other tenants of OSU's Freedom of Speech and Expression standard requires exceptional balance and thoughtfulness, and is further guided by the following philosophy, priorities, and principles.

Philosophy

OSU endeavors to create responsible citizens of the world who exercise critical thinking. We commit to nurture a university environment where differences of opinion and experience will be a part of our community.

Activism, including demonstrations and protest are an important vehicle for community members to freely express their opinions and/or advocate for change or action. Protecting and promoting freedom of speech and expression is not only a fundamental human right, but also the very bedrock of learning and should be at the center of university experience. Generating and exploring innovative ideas and realities requires us to advance multiple perspectives at once and engage in dynamic discourse.

We commit to being content neutral in our respect for freedom of speech and expression, while also advancing our values of equity for all community members. In instances where the content of a protest contrasts with our institutional values, a response from the university may be appropriate. 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.

Therefore, OSU responds to activism in a highly facilitative, engaged, and supportive manner, beginning with building trusting relationships with community and student groups, and responding to any non-life or property threatening situation with the lowest possible level of response to de-escalate disruptive activity.

Priorities

Our priorities when managing a protest on campus are:

1. Ensuring the safety of demonstrators and the university community,
2. Engaging with demonstrators when they bring voice to issues of concern,
3. Educating and committing to work with demonstrators and follow up on any issues of concern that were identified through the protest resolution.

Principles of Practice

We commit to a safe university environment: Our foremost goal as an institution is to ensure the physical safety of our community members. We seek a peaceful de-escalation of situations that may be deemed as a disruption to university business. Emergency situations must be responded to quickly and decisively by our first responders, regardless of the protest at hand. We will work in collaboration with our university first responders to assess each situation and determine the best university response.

We believe every voice matters: We affirm the right of every student, faculty, and staff member to share their voice in our university community. We support the right of every individual to express themselves and to join in assembly of that expression.

We commit to engage first with demonstrators: As university representatives, unless an emergency situation demands otherwise, we strive to create and maintain active communication with demonstrators and protect organizers during a protest. We believe creating and maintaining lines of communication before, during and after protest gives us the best opportunity to ensure safety and find opportunities for common understanding. Any law enforcement engagement, outside of emergencies, will be determined by the Protest Protocol Team.

We acknowledge our history, present and future: University activism has been a vehicle for institutional and community progress throughout the history of higher education. We stand in gratitude of such activism, which made significant strides toward equity in higher education and created educational opportunities that exist today. We acknowledge that university protest is a vehicle of university activism and support the right of our community members to engage in public action.

We seek to understand: We will seek to understand the issues that lead people to protest both in the moment of protest and beyond. We believe understanding and maintaining lines of communication with university leaders may help build relationship and trust. We believe extending opportunities for communication with university leaders may offer additional avenues to voicing concerns and working in collaboration toward solving larger issues.

We make decisions with care: We understand that people in protest sometimes aim to create disruption as a call to action, to have their voices heard, and to advance their message. We will work to balance this call to action with the necessity to maintain safety and reduce disruption to our university community and allow the business of the university to continue, including teaching, operations, and research. Any response by the institution to university protest will take these factors into account, acknowledging that context can evolve quickly and that a response may also need to evolve. Any response to university protest will always remain content neutral.