

DAVIDSON



Commitment to Freedom of Expression

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Davidson's Commitment to Freedom of Expression

We believe in free speech, free expression, and academic freedom. We believe in a robust exchange of ideas because we believe in an ethical pursuit of truth. Our official documents have outlined our commitment and, indeed, our obligation to uphold those beliefs.

The preamble of Davidson College's constitution expresses our mission:

Davidson dedicates itself to the quest for truth and encourages teachers and students to explore the whole of reality, whether physical or spiritual, with unlimited employment of their intellectual powers... Davidson... intends to teach all students to think clearly, to make relevant judgements, to discriminate among values, and to communicate freely with others in the realm of ideas.

Davidson has deepened our commitment to that ideal.

As a college that welcomes students, faculty, and staff from a variety of nationalities, ethnic groups, and traditions, Davidson values diversity, recognizing the dignity of every person.

Our college Constitution, the touchstone for our mission, gives guidance and protections for students and faculty. Article XII of Davidson College's constitution is dedicated to Students' Rights and Responsibilities and declares its commitments to free speech rights of students, setting forth specific rights of students and student organizations. Additionally, Article X addresses faculty rights of academic freedom and tenure, employment, and evaluation. Both provisions formally bind Davidson to a fundamental obligation for free speech and free communication.

Our goal is to ensure these principles live, breathe, and are personified by every member of the college community. That's not possible if some groups are intentionally or unintentionally excluded from full participation. Dissenting voices cannot and should not be censored.

True free speech, free expression, and academic freedom are not generational or preferential. In pledging to honor these ideals, we must recognize that this task can be arduous and precarious. Davidson has a professed commitment to free inquiry and to the inclusion of diverse persons and communities. We admit that these obligations have historically been more aspirational than actual. Acknowledging the intentional and unintentional exclusion of ideas and identities is both honest and constructive. Individuals and groups have been marginalized and their voices muted based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, disability, class, ideology, citizenship, and religious or political affiliation.

Davidson College guarantees all members of the college community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn, except when that expression violates the law, falsely defames a specific individual, constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests or is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the College.

Davidson College's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate, discussion and deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even most members of the college community to be offensive or unwise. We have a solemn responsibility to promote the lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation and will also protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it. It is not the proper role of the College to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find uncomfortable, disagreeable, or offensive. The role of the college is to sustain an environment in which all students can freely learn.

Davidson College greatly values civility and mutual respect, but these can never be used to justify closing off debate. In the spirit of a robust pledge to free speech and free expression, we concede that individuals invited to speak on campus may be controversial and contested. We should not obstruct or otherwise interfere with speakers who are invited to express their views on campus. For the sake of expressing as well as disputing ideas, we do not seek to censor speech or discourage protest which might encourage critical thinking. Self-silencing obstructs the pursuit to discover truth. Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the college community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of Davidson College's educational mission.

With this statement of freedom of expression, Davidson College acknowledges the need to build and nurture trust and empathy. With a generosity of spirit and forbearance, we aspire to seek common ground. To work toward these goals, we must have a unique solution that reflects and draws strength from our shared core values.

We do not expect perfection. We demand excellence. We expect to be better today than yesterday, better tomorrow still. The best way to ensure progression is to recognize that true inclusion and true free speech are interdependent. They must continue to be so.

*This document borrows from and includes language from the **Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression of the University Chicago**, the **Davidson College Statement of Purpose** and the **Davidson College Constitution**.*

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