



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

University of Toronto
Governing Council

Statement on Freedom of Speech

May 28, 1992

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Statement on Freedom of Speech

In policies approved by the Governing Council, the University community has held that the essential purpose of the University is to engage in the pursuit of truth, the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge. To achieve this purpose, all members of the University must have as a prerequisite freedom of speech and expression, which means the right to examine, question, investigate, speculate, and comment on any issue without reference to prescribed doctrine, as well as the right to criticize the University and society at large. The purpose of the University also depends upon an environment of tolerance and mutual respect. Every member should be able to work, live, teach and learn in a University free from discrimination and harassment.

The existence of an institution where unorthodox ideas, alternative modes of thinking and living, and radical prescriptions for social ills can be debated contributes immensely to social and political change and the advancement of human rights both inside and outside the University. Often this debate may generate controversy and disputes among members of the University and of the wider community. In such cases, the University's primary obligation is to protect the free speech of all involved. The University must allow the fullest range of debate. It should not limit that debate by preordaining conclusions, or punishing or inhibiting the reasonable exercise of free speech.

Of necessity, there are limits to the right of free speech, for example, when members of the University use speech as a direct attack that has the effect of preventing the lawful exercise of speech by members or invited guests, or interfering with the conduct of authorized University business, the University may intervene. Similarly, although no member of the University should use language or indulge in behaviour intended to demean others on the basis of their race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, handicap, age, marital status, family status, the receipt of public assistance or record of offence, the values of mutual respect and civility may, on occasion, be superseded by the need to protect lawful freedom of speech. However, members should not weigh lightly the shock, hurt anger or even the silencing effect that may be caused by use of such speech.

The right to free speech is complemented by the right of freedom of association. The right to free speech extends to individuals cooperating in groups. All members have the freedom to communicate in any reasonable way, to hold and advertise meetings, to debate and to engage in peaceful assemblies and demonstrations, to organize groups for any lawful activities and to make reasonable use of University facilities, in accordance with its policies as they are defined from time to time and subject to the University's rights and responsibilities.

This policy statement does not exhaust University policy with respect to freedom of speech and is not intended to amend or qualify University policies on academic freedom, as currently expressed, for example, in Article 5 of the Memorandum of Agreement between the University of Toronto and the University of Toronto Faculty Association.

January 29th , 1992