



Faculty Statement on Safety and Speech

University of Michigan Senate Assembly

Adopted: March 19, 2018

Link to this document: <http://bit.ly/UMfacSSS>

As an institution of learning and academic inquiry, the University of Michigan seeks to foster an environment where people of diverse viewpoints engage productively in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. This ideal of academic freedom,¹ however, requires both the representation of multiple perspectives *and* the safety of all members of the community. While the United States Constitution offers strong protections for free speech and expression at public universities, the same protections allow for harmful speech that can undermine safety, particularly for members of groups that are historically marginalized -- at the university, in positions of power, and in society at large. With full recognition that these are complex issues with few easy solutions, we, the faculty of the University of Michigan, affirm the following:

- 1) We affirm that everyone has a right to be safe and secure. Violence, harassment, or the threat of violence must not be tolerated.²
- 2) We affirm that everyone has a right to free speech and personal expression, especially when the intent is to open dialogue, encourage learning, or explore ideas, and even where such speech may be uncomfortable for some members of our community.³
- 3) We affirm that everyone has a right to peaceful protest and other forms of peaceful assembly, which are themselves forms of free speech and expression.⁴
- 4) We condemn all forms of hate speech, which we define as speech and other forms of expression whose sole or primary intention is to hurt, insult, discriminate against, or intimidate others. Hate speech includes, but is not limited to, the denigration of a person or group based on their race, color, ethnicity, physical appearance, disability, national origin, age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, political beliefs, height, weight, or veteran's status.⁵

¹ Issues of safety and speech arise from and interact with concerns of academic freedom. However, this statement's main concern is not primarily about faculty academic freedom, about which the Senate Assembly has previously passed a resolution: https://facultysenate.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2015/03/01-25-10_Academic-Freedom.pdf

² Violence, crime, threats, and harassment should be reported to U-M's Division of Public Safety and Security (dpss-safety-security@umich.edu or (734) 763-1131). The University of Michigan's Standard Practice Guidelines (SPG) contains explicit policies about violence, including avenues for seeking assistance: <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/601.18>. Another SPG addresses discrimination and harassment: <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/201.89-1>.

³ SPG on freedom of speech: <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/601.01>.

⁴ The SPG on freedom of speech also discusses policies on peaceful protest: <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/601.01>.

⁵ The United States Constitution contains strong protections for free speech, which make it difficult to proscribe many kinds of offensive speech, and there is disagreement even among reasonable people as to how far free speech should be protected. As a result, the University of Michigan cannot forbid, censor, or penalize hate speech where it is protected by U.S. law. Nevertheless, we condemn hate speech as inimical to the values of the university community.



- 5) We urge all members of the university to make active use of available resources to report instances of bias, hate speech, racism, bigotry, discrimination, and prejudice.⁶ We urge the university to ensure appropriate mechanisms for grievances, investigation, mediation, and redress in response to violations of these principles.⁷
- 6) Acts of hate speech, racism, bigotry, discrimination, and prejudice are reprehensible. Yet, formal sanctions against them, even where consistent with or permitted by law, cannot eliminate every instance. We therefore urge members of the university community to respond to such acts with activism and civic engagement. We pledge to foster openness and inquisitiveness among our students along with the strength and confidence to thrive within and beyond the university. We encourage students to view their university education as a form of empowerment that contributes to their capacity for activism and civic engagement.
- 7) We urge members of the university community, where their speech may cause others discomfort, to ensure that their intentions are aligned with the goals of dialogue, learning, and exploration, and when possible to frame their speech so as to make these positive goals clear. Where speech is aggressive or personally directed, positive outcomes are unlikely.
- 8) We urge members of the university community to make a reasonable attempt at understanding others' perspectives and experiences, and specifically how others may perceive what we express.
- 9) Harmful speech can happen unintentionally. When there is unintentional harm, we encourage those harmed to voice their concerns, and those who have caused harm to acknowledge it and to seek to minimize harm in the future.⁸

There will be unavoidable disagreements between what some consider free speech and what others feel as incursions on their safety. These disagreements can cause pain and discomfort, but they are also an inevitable consequence of protecting important academic and democratic values. Meanwhile, disagreement is most productive when it is also dialogue, dialogue based on the conviction that all members of our community have a legitimate claim to personhood and dignity. Honest inquiry requires that *all* voices -- particularly the voices of groups whose speech has been historically underrepresented -- are included and heard. As faculty at the University of Michigan, we earnestly hope for, and will work toward, a campus and a society that shares these principles.⁹

⁶ Report bias incidents at <https://expectrespect.umich.edu/topic/report-incident> or (734) 615-BIAS (2427). Report violence or crime to U-M's Division of Public Safety and Security (dpss-safety-security@umich.edu or (734) 763-1131).

⁷ See the following SPG sites for further information on what to do in case of problems: For violence, <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/601.18>; for discrimination and harassment, <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/201.89-1>; for faculty and staff grievances, <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/201.08>. Additional links for confidential counseling: <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/201.89-1>. For issues not covered in the webpages above, search at the University of Michigan Standard Practice Guide: <http://www.spg.umich.edu/>.

⁸ These values are drawn from the concept of a *brave space*, about which more is available here: <https://ssw.umich.edu/sites/default/files/documents/events/colc/from-safe-spaces-to-brave-spaces.pdf>

⁹ This statement was formally adopted by the Senate Assembly on March 19, 2018, following endorsement by the Committee for an Inclusive University on January 5, 2018. It was drafted by a committee of University of Michigan faculty: Evelyn Alsultany, Cleopatra Caldwell, Jorge Delva, Avery Demond, Ann Lin, Ashley Lucas, Bethany Moore, Sally Oey, Scott Page, Deborah Rivas-Drake, Kentaro Toyama, Al Young.