

Statement on Academic Freedom and Institutional Resources

As engaged public scholars, we know that sometimes our ideas and perspectives, often informed by years of research and scholarship, can be controversial, particularly when they touch on issues where there are strongly divided perspectives in our society. Today, I write to reaffirm the university leadership's dedication to and unwavering support for academic freedom – the right to pursue intellectual directions freely and unfettered – as the bedrock principle of our scholarly enterprise and its embodiment in the University of Utah.

Please know that should you face hostile questions about your research, scholarship, or creative works, or experience personal threats, while in the fulfillment of your university responsibilities, we are here for you. In that spirit, this [new website](#) shares key resources regarding policies, procedures, and responsibilities for academic freedom, public communications, and safety.

These include:

- The U's speech policy, including faculty rights and responsibilities
- Communication resources, including how and when to interact with government officials
- Safety resources, including how to respond to threats and harassment
- Protection of employee privacy
- Document preservation when subject to GRAMA (Freedom of Information) requests

As always, if you have questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact your unit leader, dean, vice-president, or senior vice-president.

Who We Are and Why It Matters

In the midst of uncertain times – a pandemic, cultural and political divisions, persistent social inequities, and evolving environmental change – it is also important to pause and remember who and what we are and why open intellectual inquiry is so fundamental to our democracy. That is especially true in times of *Sturm und Drang*, though such times seem to be with us always. All too often, the prosaic exigencies of publication deadlines, course schedules, and research proposals can overwhelm us and cause us to lose sight of foundational principles.

We have the great privilege and high honor to be members of the scholarly community at one of this country's great public research universities. As such, we are curators of the storehouse of human knowledge, one built, sustained, and expanded across generations at great cost and sacrifice, a shared birthright preserved for the benefit of all of humanity.

As researchers and scholars, we are not mere custodians of the past. We are active explorers of the great unknown, asking penetrating questions, and seeking answers to difficult questions. In so doing, we expand humanity's understanding, for the benefit of current and future generations. Each of us has known the joy of scholarly insight, when first seeing new connections, elucidating a phenomenon, or understanding relationships and principles. That joy is extraordinary and transcendent – in that moment of discovery, one can live a lifetime, and a thousand lifetimes would not be enough. Make no mistake,

this insatiable desire to know and understand is a defining attribute of our humanity; it is an urge older than history, a siren that calls us to the future.

Powerful though that impulse is, it does not solely define us, for we do so much more than steward and expand the great mosaic of human knowledge. We joyously share that knowledge and those newly won insights with inquisitive minds, young and old. Even more importantly, we teach our students the one truly enduring life skill – not only how to learn what is known, but how to seek new knowledge and create new insights from the unknown. And in so doing, we teach them to understand and evaluate subtlety, nuance, conflict, and complexity; and how to think deeply, critically, and holistically about it all. This is the quintessence of the active and engaged scholarly education that only a great research university can impart.

Most of all, we seek to live the words of Plutarch, the Greek philosopher, believing, “The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.” A mind set on fire with knowledge and kindled with critical thinking blazes for a lifetime, as a thoughtful citizen of our state, our country, and our world. In the transgenerational trust, we are the midwife of student futures, one mind at a time. We owe each and every parent and child the opportunity and our support to pursue those dreams, regardless of their background, their ethnicity, their gender, their creed, their economic status, or the circumstances of their birth. As Chaucer said, gladly would we learn, and gladly teach.

Finally, we engage our communities, our state, our country, and our world, sharing the benefits and bounty that accrue from their support and our unfettered intellectual explorations. Whether in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, health and medicine, the social and behavioral sciences, the humanities, or the creative arts, we share our insights and our ideas for the common good. We work to solve the world’s most pressing problems, partnering in the spirit of humility, and marshalling the diverse disciplinary resources of our institution in a collaborative way that embodies the One Utah ethos.

I conclude as I began. Society has vouchsafed in us an extraordinary privilege, as scholarly stewards and explorers, individually and institutionally entrusted with the hopes of parents and dreams of children, united in our ardent desire to create a bright and beckoning future. It is a deep and sacred trust, a principled compact embodying mutual expectations and shared responsibilities. We must honor it each day with our words and deeds. This is who we are and why it matters, now more than ever.

Coda

In the words of Tolkien, himself an Oxford scholar,

*All that is gold does not glitter;
Not all who wander are lost.
The old that is strong does not wither.
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.*

The knowledge and wisdom we seek are the enduring gold that does not glitter. As we wander in search of new knowledge, we are inveterate, peripatetic explorers, but we are not lost. The deep truths and open questions about our world and the human condition endure, untouched by transient vicissitudes, but illuminated and expanded by new insights and ideas.

