

Dear campus community,

In the fall of 2021, the Academic Freedom/Freedom of Speech Committee was organized by President Taylor Randall as part of the Operation Bold Transition team to reaffirm the university's bedrock principle of open and unfettered intellectual inquiry and the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. My involvement in this committee has been inspiring and invigorating to me as I see the potential for growth not just on our campus, but in our surrounding community. I am excited to see how we can be a catalyst for building understanding.

The university is a place where people can exercise and submit their thoughts and ideas about a variety of intellectual pursuits. It promotes diverse opinions, critical thinking, debate and civility. Consistent with the University of Utah's goal of creating an exceptional education experience for students, it is important for students to share their experiences, learn from their mistakes, be exposed to diverse and multidimensional perspectives, and engage in the free exchange of ideas in the pursuit of truth and development of knowledge. As a hallmark of higher education, academic freedom and freedom of speech foster critical thinking and help to create an environment for civic engagement. At its best, academic freedom and freedom of speech reflect the values of a free and open society, bestowing them on the campus community. As part of a free society, all voices are heard at the University of Utah — libertarian, conservative, liberal and progressive.

The freedom to examine competing ideas does not provide the right for individuals or groups to say anything they want at any time and place. The university can impose reasonable time, place and manner restrictions on speech, as well as other restrictions, to avoid disruption of its ordinary activities. Therefore, reasonable regulations are enacted by the U in the promotion of a safe and conducive learning environment for all.

Free speech in higher education involves respectful disagreement, civic engagement in dispute resolution and a search for the truth based on democratic principles. With these basic understandings in mind, the committee has proposed a slate of events and activities as methods of demonstrating the importance of academic freedom and freedom of speech at the University of Utah, such as:

1. Host forums with external speakers on contemporary sociocultural and First Amendment topics.
2. Identify national speakers on social issues related to academic freedom/freedom of speech.
3. Collaborate with the J. Willard Marriott Library to host a series of events on academic freedom/freedom of speech.

4. Work with Associated Students of the University of Utah (ASUU) on student engagement and events on academic freedom/freedom of speech.

More information about events such as these and other ongoing initiatives will be announced as the details are established. It is my hope that as we work together, listen to each other and consider a variety of different perspectives, our collective values and opinions may expand in ways that will benefit our community. As W. E. B. DuBois once said, “Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year.”

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