

Tulsa Community College: Freedom of Expression Policy *

Because Tulsa Community College is committed to free and open inquiry, it guarantees all College community members the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to its functioning, the College fully respects and supports the freedom of its community members “to discuss any problem that presents itself.”

Of course, the ideas of different TCC community members will often and quite naturally conflict; it is not, however, the institution’s proper role to shield (or attempt to shield) individuals from ideas and opinions others might consider unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. The College values civility and all TCC community members are responsible for maintaining a climate of mutual respect; nonetheless, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used to justify the shutting down of discussion, however offensive or disagreeable ideas may be to some community members.

The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not, of course, mean individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. The College may restrict expression determined to be illegal, falsely defamatory, harassing, and genuinely threatening. The College may also restrict expression that violates substantial privacy, confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the institution’s functioning. In addition, TCC may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure it does not disrupt the College’s ordinary activities. These are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression. Moreover, these exceptions must never be used in a manner inconsistent with TCC’s commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.

In a word, the College maintains a fundamental commitment to the principle that debate and deliberation may not be suppressed because some, or even many, TCC community members consider the ideas put forth to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. Individual members of the College community, not the institution, must make judgments for themselves. When TCC community members disagree with ideas, they should seek not to suppress speech; rather, College members should openly and vigorously contest ideas they oppose. Indeed, TCC bears the essential mission of fostering its community members to engage in responsible debate and deliberation.

As a corollary to TCC’s commitment to protect and promote free expression, College community members must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression. Members of the TCC community may criticize and contest views expressed on campus; they may criticize and contest invited speakers. They may not, however, obstruct or interfere with another’s right to expression, even when a community member may reject or even loathe those ideas. To this end, the College has solemn responsibilities: to promote the freedoms of debate and deliberation, and to protect these freedoms when others attempt to restrict them.

* Amended from <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/model-freedom-expression-resolution-based-university-chicago-statement>