

Statement on Freedom of Expression

Eastern Oregon University serves our students, our nation, and our world, by being a place where the higher levels of learning are practiced and lived on a daily basis. Education is a process of changing oneself, an enterprise fraught with conflict between old values and new, old ideas and new. Students come to a university to be challenged, and to become, through that process, larger, more capable and wiser. EOU is committed to being a place where the skills of learning, of inquiry, of examination, of debate and reasoning, are modeled, practiced and learned – skills that our graduates will incorporate into their sense of themselves, and will build on and develop throughout the rest of their lives.

1. The right to freedom of expression. When our nation's founders decided to make explicit the rights necessary for the functioning of their republic, they placed freedom from governmentally imposed religion, freedom of personal religious practice, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to assemble, and the right to demand government action to protect these freedoms in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

2. Civility and freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is fundamental to learning and the development of new ideas in an institution of higher education. It is not the role of the university to protect individuals or groups from offensive speech, but to protect the rights of individuals and groups to express themselves and to contest the expression of others. The necessity of considering radical and unpopular ideas, and of doing so within a framework of civility, is at the heart of the decisions by which the federal courts have enforced the First Amendment. Governments may set reasonable limits on the time, place, and manner of political speech, but generally cannot regulate its content. Within that framework, it is not acceptable to object to an idea because it offends one personally. Ideas must stand or fall by their inherent merit, tested in public debate. The rules of debate and discussion allow any idea to be weighed in the balance of reasoned intellectual inquiry.*

3. Equity and inclusion and freedom of expression. EOU recognizes that some speech risks the climate of inclusivity necessary for equitable educational opportunity. In most circumstances, an inclusive environment is best supported by more rather than less dialogue so that ideas can be aired and addressed. In such dialogue, the university may exercise its own right to contest expression that opposes the institution's commitment to equity and inclusion.

**Exceptions to the university's commitment may occur when expression violates the law, for example, in the case of true threats, incitements to violence, defamation, harassment, or confidentiality requirements. Conduct that goes beyond simple expression so as to violate criminal laws or the student conduct code is not protected expression. Additionally, the university may limit the time, place and manner of expression to protect ordinary operations of the institution and safety of the campus community (see the Public Demonstrations Policy).*