

## **Statement of Values on Free Expression American University**

American University is committed to protecting expression in the service of its academic mission. This statement explains the spirit in which we understand this commitment and the values that undergird our policies with regard to expression.

[The mission of American University](#) is “to advance knowledge, foster intellectual curiosity, build community, and empower lives of purpose, service, and leadership.” Our community aims to achieve that mission by fostering an ethos and culture of inquiry. By inquiry, we mean an open-ended process of questioning the world, opinions, and points of view prevalent in our time and place, and our own beliefs. Inquiry is put into practice by a relentless effort to separate truth from opinion and is animated by the awareness that we might be wrong about important things. When we engage in inquiry, we may have to confront truths that are unpleasant and ideas and perspectives with which we disagree or even find loathsome. When we do so, however, it is imperative to affirm that confrontation with such truths and such perspectives is not an endorsement or validation of them. Rather, we affirm the value of inquiry, even when it is challenging, because we believe in the dignity of individuals to investigate the world for themselves and to make up their own minds about what they discover.

The value of an ethos of inquiry is not tied to a specific political agenda or point of view. Members of our community can and do disagree about many things, including how our society can best solve its problems. Such disagreement is not only welcome in our community; it is essential to the endeavor of seeking truth. A commitment to inquiry and the protections for expression that flow from that commitment are especially important for minority groups and critics of the status quo. Defenders of the status quo have often tried to use restrictions on expression to avoid unwelcome truths, and marginalized groups have often used protected speech to educate wider publics. By preserving the ability to inquire freely and encouraging a robust culture of inquiry, we keep open the possibility of future progress, perhaps in ways that we may not be aware of in the present.

While our commitment to fostering a culture of inquiry will often lead us to protect the rights of individuals to express themselves, we do not understand that commitment simply in terms of rights. We recognize a collective responsibility to help members of our community develop the character traits of resilience, honesty, and respect for one another as fellow inquirers. We especially hope to foster and practice intellectual humility, which we define as a willingness to listen, to consider multiple perspectives, and to be open to the possibility that we ourselves might be wrong. We recognize that inquiry is often challenging and can sometimes cause harm. All of us will make mistakes which will sometimes be hurtful to others. Each of us has a responsibility to listen and learn when we make mistakes, to work to repair harm caused, and to respond to others who make good faith mistakes respectfully and with grace, even in disagreement. Only by practicing intellectual humility in these ways can we reap the benefits of inquiry, both for us as individuals and for our community.

American University’s commitment to protecting free expression is manifest throughout our institutional policies and practices. This core value advances our mission by ensuring that each of us will have the opportunity to pursue the truth as we understand it, and empower us to pursue lives of purpose, service, and leadership in a complex world.

--As adopted by the Faculty Senate of American University, May 4, 2022