

Augustana College
Statement on Freedom of Expression
Fall 2024

Freedom of speech and expression are central to the mission of Augustana College. As a liberal arts institution, we choose to both encourage and safeguard the airing of diverse opinions to create an environment where ideas can be freely expressed and challenged. Disagreement represents a natural and essential part of the educational environment. As an inclusive campus, community members must be able to listen, examine, discuss and understand others' experiences, viewpoints and opinions. Indeed, reasoned examination represents one of our Five Faith Commitments and a tenet of our community's approach to learning.

As stated in the College's 2017 statement, suppressing unwanted views is antithetical to our core values as an institution of higher learning. Views and speech that do not align with the institution's values, or with those who are members of this community, will not be banished from campus. Instead, such expressions will be protected, because our core identity as a knowledge-seeking institution requires that members of our community understand, debate and challenge not only the opinions they agree with, but also those opinions that they find disagreeable, controversial, challenging and even offensive.

At the same time, we are a community. Just because an individual can express an opinion or viewpoint does not mean that they should. Expressive freedom comes with responsibility. Our Community Principles of purpose, openness, respect, accountability, responsibility and care should guide our communications and interactions with others, even when failure to do so may not constitute a policy violation. As a member of this community, we should always ask the question of how we can uphold, promote, or as the case may be, restore our community principles as we interact with one another. Of course, speech that rises to the level of prohibited harassment, true threat or incitement of violence does carry disciplinary consequences.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that skills such as listening, empathy and understanding are all critical elements of the practice of expressive freedom. They are life skills that provide the foundation for the critical thinking, problem solving and ability to debate that is sorely needed in our communities, our workplaces and our society. So as we commit to this practice we are also committing to preparing our graduates for a lifetime of learning and leadership, and ensuring that they will continue the Augustana legacy of being impactful and open-minded citizens in their communities.

I trust that all members of the Augustana community will abide by the commitment to academic inquiry and expressive freedom that is the foundation of intellectual growth, and builds essential skills for personal and professional success, while also remaining respectful of the community that we share.