

Plan for forming the University Committee for the Promotion of Free Expression

Darrin Hicks, Kate Willink, John Tiedemann

I. The Committee's purpose

Freedom of expression is crucial to the mission of the University of Denver. Absent a commitment to freedom of expression, the University could neither pursue its three core goals of promoting community, learning, and scholarship, nor promote its key values: excellence, innovation, engagement, integrity and inclusiveness. To claim that freedom of expression is crucial to our values and goals is not, however, to ignore the fact that a commitment to speech can, on occasion, create tension within those same values and goals, as recent events across the country and on our own campus have shown. In a society confronting social, racial, gender, religious, economic, and other inequalities, where historically some voices and some communities have been marginalized, excluded, or silenced, a commitment to free speech must, at the same time, include a commitment to inclusiveness, to insure that all members of our community feel equally welcome to participate in discourse and receive divergent information.

Recognizing the central importance of freedom of expression to our educational mission, the Faculty Senate last year voted to adopt a motion, The University of Denver Statement of Policy and Principles on Freedom of Expression, the product of more than a year's work by a committee of faculty from across campus. In addition to defining DU policy and principles on freedom of expression, the statement also charges the Senate with appointing a University Committee for the Promotion of Free Expression, charged with the following:

1. proactively creating forums for meaningful, responsible engagement of diverse and opposing viewpoints among all campus constituencies, particularly concerning the types of issues that are likely to lead to tensions on campus;
2. addressing such issues as they arise in ways that aim to resolve them in a manner that increases dialogue, respects speakers of diverse viewpoints, and seeks to heal and build community;
3. when requested, assisting the University in examining issues of freedom of expression.

Taken together, these charges empower the Committee to serve a fundamental educational purpose: to cultivate amongst constituencies across campus a deep understanding of and appreciation for the value of freedom of expression, particularly as that value intersects with other, equally central DU values, notably diversity and inclusivity.

II. What does the committee do?

To fulfill its purpose, the Committee shall draw its members from the faculty, the student body, members of staff, and administrators. It shall sponsor or cosponsor ongoing programming and

educational resources; collaborate with sponsors of specific events on campus, as they occur; and advise on issues that may arise from time to time.

A. Creating programming and educational resources

The Committee shall work proactively with entities on campus such as Student Life, Faculty Senate, and others invested in freedom of expression issues to create dialogues around the concept of freedom of expression, its relationship to other central DU values, and about University policy.

The Committee shall also work with experts on and off campus to create educational materials about the responsible practice of free expression on our campus.

B. Helping to plan events and to reflect upon them

As members of the campus community plan debates, demonstrations, visits from potentially controversial speakers, and other events wherein issues of freedom of expression may arise, the Committee will advise on ways to design events so as to respect the value of free expression and of inclusion. The Committee shall also serve as a response team, committed to helping address issues of free expression in real time.

C. Reviewing and reporting

The Committee shall review incidents referred to it alleging that freedom of expression has been unjustifiably curtailed or that expression has been practiced in ways that diminish or conflict with other DU values. When appropriate, it shall issue advisory reports on these incidents to the campus bodies charged with dealing with them.¹

III. The composition of the Committee

A. Committee structure

- Faculty Senate President, Incoming or Immediate Past Senate President, Staff Advisory Council President, Undergraduate Student Government President, Graduate Student Government President

¹ Nothing in the present document supersedes, substitutes for, or eliminates, policies and procedures in the University's Policies and Procedures Relating to Faculty Appointment, Promotion, and Tenure (the APT document), the Office of Equal Opportunity & Office of Title IX Procedures, the Employee Grievance Policy, or Student Conduct.

- Standing Ex Officio Members- Provost or his or her designee, Director of Campus Safety or his or her designee, Vice Chancellor of Campus Life and Inclusive Excellence or his or her designee, General Counsel
- 4–6 campus community members (depending on the pool and their qualifications)

B. Selection of committee members

Selection Committee: Current & Incoming or Immediate Past Faculty Senate President, plus Staff Advisory Council President, Undergraduate Student Government President, Graduate Student Government President

Faculty Senate President issues an open call to the entire campus, inviting applicants. Applicants send a letter of interest for the University Committee for the Promotion of Free Expression that addresses their position on campus, their motivation for serving on the committee, how they meet the desired qualities of committee members, and relevant previous experience. We also encourage you to nominate people around campus who you think would be excellent committee members. They would then be contacted and encouraged to apply. Please send nominations to: kate.willink@du.edu. The Selection Committee reviews applications, interviews finalists, and selects candidates. Then the Senate Executive Committee reviews and approves the committee members.

C. Commitment of committee members

The committee will meet 1–2 times/quarter. Additionally, the committee, including the ex officio members, will be available within an eight-hour response time when urgent issues arises. In the case that an appointed member is away or needed elsewhere during a particular emergency, appointed committee members will send a designee in their stand. Committee members will serve one-year terms with the option to reapply for a total service of up to three years.

D. Desired qualities of Committee members

In keeping with our Faculty Senate’s commitment to diversity, broadly conceived, in committee compositions, additional criteria includes:

- Familiarity or willingness to learn about issues surrounding freedom of expression on college campuses
- Familiarity or willingness to learn about designing dialogic and deliberative forums on campus—forums capable of hosting difficult conversations in such a way as to maintain robust commitments to inclusivity and freedom of expression
- Understanding of and experience with various constituencies and viewpoints on campus